鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ
とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）5
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 5

<< CONTENTS >>

- Illustrations
- Prologue: Night of Opening. Good_Bye_Yesterday.
- Chapter 1: A Certain Scientific One-Way Road. Last_Order.
- Chapter 2: A Certain Ojou's Railgun. Doubt_Lovers.
- Chapter 3: A Certain Misaka's Final Signal. Tender_or_Sugary.
- Chapter 4: A Certain Freeloading Forbidden Index. Arrow_Made_of_AZUSA.
- Epilogue: Night of Ending. Welcome_to_Tomorrow.
- Afterword
- Notes
- Credits

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 5

August 31.

On that day, at a back alley, Accelerator encountered this mysterious girl. This person, I've seen this face somewhere before...

On this day, Misaka Mikoto was lured by a male student for a date in front of the student dormitories. He's also a very invigorating person.

As for Kamijou Touma's day, he was able to feel that it would be the start of an unfortunate day in his home. That's because, he realised that all his homework for summer vacation hasn't been done at all...

August 31. The last day of the summer vacation of Academy City. And that is where their respective stories shall begin...!

Thus begins, the 5th part of the hugely popular school action story released by the combination of Kamachi and Haimura!

翳
か-12-5
とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）⑤
鎌池和馬
電撃文庫
570

9784840230254
1920193005707

ISBN4-8402-3025-0
C0193 ¥570E

MediaWorks
Published by MediaWorks
Recommended Retail Price: 570 JPY
*Consumption levy would be added to the price separately

Kamachi Kazuma

In the minds of humans, it seems, there are cells that are able to differentiate the faces of people. Having any malfunctions in this area would lead to people being able to see faces on the stains on walls. Do refer to the recent photograph of the author. ...Um, did any malfunctions occur to me?

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index
Toaru Majutsu no Index 2
Toaru Majutsu no Index 3
Toaru Majutsu no Index 4
Toaru Majutsu no Index 5

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born in 1973. Ever since he started to live alone, the likelihood of eating out has risen dramatically. The highly praised Angel's Law too is rapidly rising...

カバー／あかつきBP

とある魔術の
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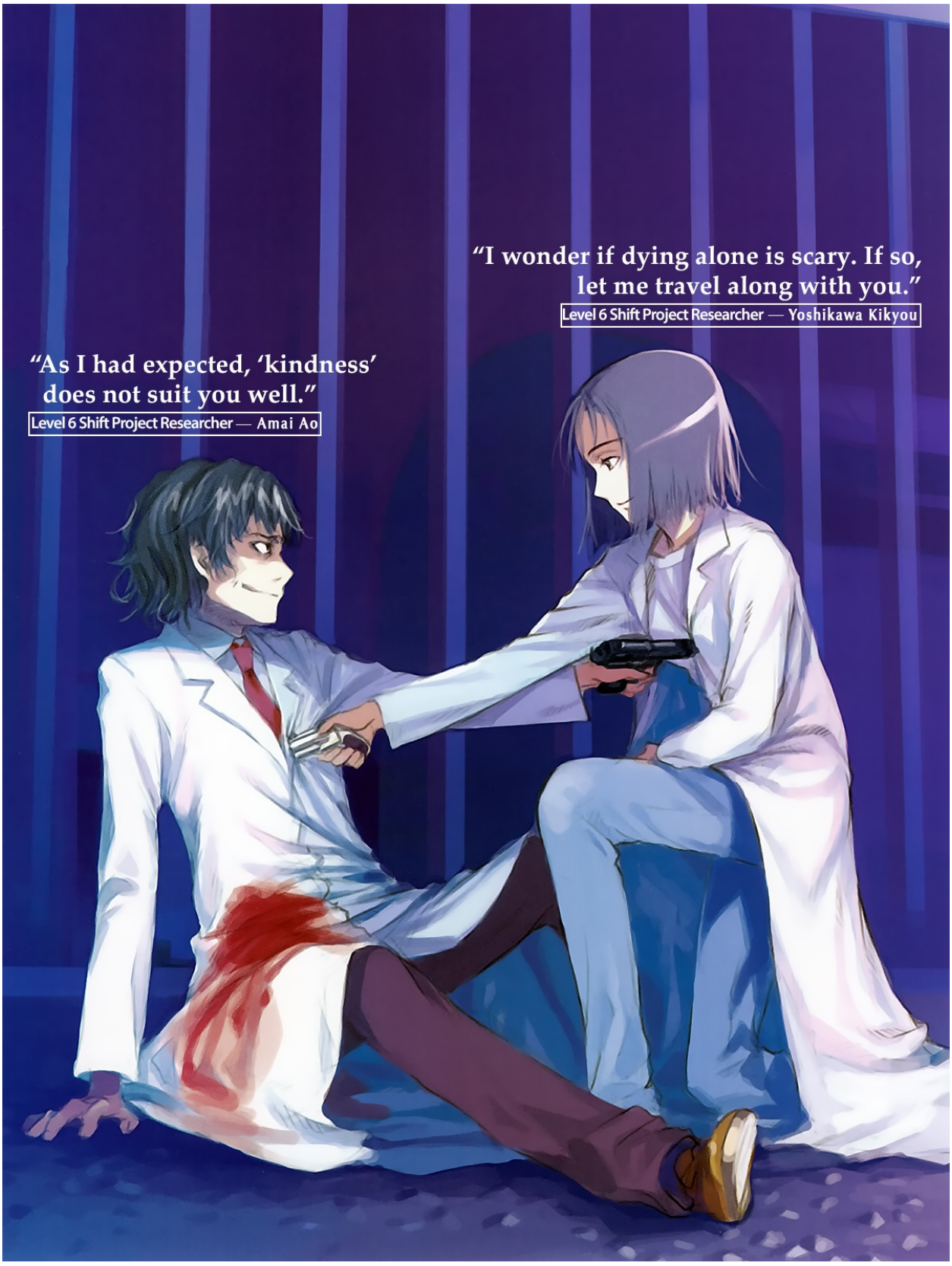
インデックス
5
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

"Say, ummm, ummm, are you serious?"
Mysterious young vagrant girl — Last Order
"Ah? What's this,
—Rather, what's going on!?"
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator

"Waited? I asked you if you waited for a long time. Did you hear that or not!?"

Student of Tokiwadai Middle School in Academy City — Misaka Mikoto

"I can't do something like taking her forcefully because I know that would make her cry. It's useless if I can't let her have happiness."
Grandson of Tokiwadai Middle School's board chairperson — Unabara Mitsuki


"I wonder if dying alone is scary. If so, let me travel along with you."
Level 6 Shift Project Researcher — Yoshikawa Kikyou
"As I had expected, 'kindness' does not suit you well."
Level 6 Shift Project Researcher — Amai Ao

"It shall soon be completed. I have no intention of playing along with you children."
Magician — Yamisaka Ouma
"What on earth do you think you're doing!"
High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma
"...Touma!"
Nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index

contents

10 Prologue **Night of Opening** Good_Bye_Yesterday.

22 Chapter 1 **A Certain Scientific One-Way Road** Last_Order.

78 Chapter 2 **A Certain Ojou's Railgun** Doubt_Lovers.

162 Chapter 3 **A Certain Misaka's Final Signal** Tender_or_Sugary

258 Chapter 4 **A Certain Freeloading Forbidden Index** Arrow_Made_of_AZUSA

318 Epilogue **Night of Ending** Welcome_to_Tomorrow.

Prologue: Night of Opening. *Good_Bye_Yesterday.*

August 31, 12:00 AM.

A nosebleed.

It was late at night. Kamijou was holding his nose in the bathtub, which had been drained of it's hot water and wiped clean of every drop of water. The reason for the nosebleed was likely having eaten too many peanuts. Just to be safe, he put away the cell phone he was using at the corner of the tub.

The bathroom was Kamijou's private room, and also his bedroom. Even though he lived in a student dormitory, in the next room, there was another girl who called herself Index.

That resident was the biggest problem for the healthy high school student Kamijou Touma. As a countermeasure against the girl who became a resident there without a care, Kamijou locked himself in the bathroom at night to prevent himself from doing something that shouldn't be done.

What was mentionable was that Kamijou had no idea why he was living together with a girl, as he had lost his memories. To Kamijou, they were living together for some unknown reason.

Normally speaking, in that situation, the one that used a lock was the girl… but whenever Index got to the point where she was in a deep sleep, she would open the lock, and go to Kamijou's side, so there was no point in telling her to lock up.

(Uu… tissue, tissue.)

Kamijou held his nose and opened the door. Index should have been asleep by now. All the lights were off. In the weak moonlight, he could only see the outlines of things.

From somewhere far off—probably outside the dorms—came the sounds of fighting, though it was not very clear when it reached Kamijou's room. Kamijou's attention drifted outside briefly, and then moved back into the room.

The room was very messy. Magazines and manga that were read halfway through were spread all over the floor. The books on the shelves were messily arranged. A dozen wires were plugged into a TV, connecting it to several gaming consoles. On a small glass-surfaced table was a laptop, and on top of that was a plastic bottle containing a half-finished drink.

A bed was next to the wall, and the box of tissues should have been somewhere close to the bed… Kamijou recalled the furniture arrangement and moved across the floor. When he got to the side of the bed, Kamijou's foot crushed something. It felt like a cardboard box. After picking it up, he found it to be a flattened tissue box.

"…Unlucky to the power of twenty. Ah, forget it; even if the tissue's flat, it's still usable."

Even though it would be kind of gross putting tissue that had been stepped on into his nose, he didn't have any other tissues available. Kamijou sighed, took out a tissue from the flattened box, and, after rolling it up, put it into his nose.

At that moment, light came in through the window.

Kamijou's dormitory was only two meters away from the next one; if they turned their lights on, even Kamijou's room would be lit up.

Though the curtains were pulled over the window, they couldn't block all of the light coming in.

The artificial light dimly lit up the room, turning the place where only silhouettes could be seen into one where the color and texture of things could be discerned.

The scene that Kamijou saw gave him some slight breathing problems.

The first thing that came to mind was the slight breathing sounds.

Following the breathing sounds, he saw the girl sleeping peacefully on the bed.

The girl had an age of about fourteen or fifteen, long silver hair, and white skin. She was tiny in stature and light in weight, but her body temperature seemed to be higher than a normal person’s. Even though nothing like cosmetics were applied, her skin still gave off a sweet and light aroma—one of her personal traits.

This girl who was wearing only a loose shirt and sleeping soundly was called Index.

He didn’t know if it was because she was feeling a bit hot, but the blanket had been kicked off the bed. The girl was sleeping on her side with bent limbs, and she looked like a baby asleep in a mother’s lap.

The bed wasn’t big to begin with, but for some reason, she was only sleeping in one corner of it.

The remaining space was almost like it had been specially left for someone.

(Uu… it’s obvious who that space is for.)

Kamijou’s face blushed in the darkness, but he shook his head. Index’s casual actions stemmed from her trust in Kamijou—maybe slightly different to actual romantic feelings for Kamijou. The impression she gave people was that of a pure child, without an ounce of adultness in her.

And the one that she trusted wasn’t the Kamijou standing here now.

Kamijou Touma lost his memories, but Index didn’t know this. In other words, the one she trusted was the Kamijou Touma "before the memory loss", and not the Kamijou Touma "standing here right now".

And so, Kamijou told himself to not misunderstand, that those things didn’t exist for his sake. Her defenseless way of sleeping, the thought of wanting to sleep in the same bed as him, the lips that faintly opened with her breath, the small chest that heaved slightly whenever she breathed, the soft snow-white legs that poked out of her loose shirt…

(…Uh… how to say this, yes, I know, this is a bit…)

Kamijou was sweating slightly, and stiffened up. At this time, the regular sound of Index’s light snoring stopped. She started to twist and turn on the bed, and her breathing became more focused. And then, the eyes that were closed opened.

“Mm… mm… Touma?”

Index said while rubbing her eyes.

“Ah, sorry, did I wake you?”

“I woke up because it got too bright. Ah, the ones on the other side turned on their lights. Turning on the lights at this time of night, they really don’t think of other people—"

Halfway through the sentence, Index suddenly stopped.

Just as Kamijou was getting puzzled, he saw Index starting to check if her clothes were messed up. Then, she held her shoulders while sitting on the bed, staring at Kamijou with a suspicious look.

“Uh, Touma, I have to ask you. What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean 'what am I doing here'? I’m just here to try and stop my nosebleed—”

Halfway through, Kamijou finally realized the current situation.

Index, who had been asleep, was covered only by a loose shirt, and with her legs daringly left out in the open, now found Kamijou with tissues in his nose and other traces of having a nosebleed.

First question: To a girl that just woke up, what would this situation mean?

Kamijou felt sweat unnaturally coming out of his palms. He had a very bad feeling about this. The eyes of the girl on the bed started to show signs of anger, which seemed to prove the bad feeling’s accuracy. That was right, he shouldn't misunderstand, her being defenseless was only because of her trust in Kamijou Touma, and not because she was willing to give everything to Kamijou. Going into someone else’s bed while half-asleep was on a completely different level compared to giving one’s body to someone else while fully aware of things.

“Ah… Oi, oi, Index ojou-sama, don’t misunderstand. The old cliché that a nosebleeds means excitement only appears in things like manga. It can’t possibly happen in real life, that’s only a kind of expression—"

“Touma.”

Index cut off Touma’s mumble.

Index’s face had a first-class expression of danger that looked like something between crying and being angry, and she asked, “Can you swear to our Father in Heaven that you didn’t have any thoughts when you saw me sleeping?”

Index stared at Kamijou.

“Uu…” Kamijou panicked slightly inside.

To be honest, Kamijou almost couldn’t handle it when he had seen Index’s sleeping expression. Index’s sleeping expression had been extremely cute, and her pure-white legs had made Kamijou swallow his drool.

But facing this girl who could explode at any time, he couldn't possibly say those things.

The girl had a bad habit, and that was biting people. When she was in a good mood, she would bite lightly on the arms; when in a bad mood, she would bite viciously on the head. Though Kamijou hadn’t seen her do the same thing to anyone else aside from him, no matter what, that bad habit had been giving Kamijou a lot of problems. A few of his clothes were already full of holes, and he now had to worry about scalp problems at a young age.

“Touma, can you swear?”

Index asked again, as if to double-check.

As part of the group that was against bad habits like biting people’s heads, Kamijou could only pretend in an offhandedly manner and said, “Ha! What are you saying, little lady? Your sleeping expression can’t possibly let people have those kinds of thoughts at all—”

Before he could finish, Index brutally rushed in and tackled Kamijou to the

ground, then sat on him and began gnawing at Kamijou’s head madly.

“'Can’t possibly let people have those kinds of thoughts at all'?! I’m still a girl, and you have none of those kinds of thoughts at all!? I still have my pride as a girl!”

The girl said with a fiery aura of anger and tears welling up in her eyes. That attack style of hers, speaking while biting down, made Kamijou feel even more pain.

“Ah! So that’s what you meant! I got it wrong! Sorry, Index ojou-sama! Actually, after I, Kamijou Touma, saw your sleeping expression, my heart is pounding madly!”

“Changing your answer now is too late!”

“No matter what I choose, I’d get bitten right? Dammit! Not even the Railgun Mikoto is this violent!”

At this moment, one of Index’s eyebrows twitched.

“…Touma, who’s this 'Railgun Mikoto'?”

“Ah—” The bad feeling just intensified. “A relative of the deity Izanagi. So? It has a Japanese air to it right?”[1]

“Liar! You’re definitely lying! I may not know what a railgun is, but I can tell that it’s not something from traditional Japanese culture!”

“Whatever, I forgot how to write the deity Izanagi in kanji anyway! What’s wrong with a deity that can use railgun in Japanese folklore anyway—Ouch! Ouch!”

With the ferocious girl straddled on him, Kamijou wanted to escape as soon as possible, but his center of gravity was being restricted and he couldn’t move away. Even though the right hand that was the Imagine Breaker had the power to negate any other supernatural power, it was completely useless for that situation, so Kamijou was currently a literal Level 0 esper. Kamijou could only move his head freely. Upon doing so, the tissue that was in his nose flew out of it.

A red liquid shot out from his nose in a torrent.

Maybe it was because she had seen blood that Index finally calmed down. Her eyebrows were slightly raised, and she didn’t quite know how to handle it.

“T-Touma, your nose really is bleeding, how did this happen?”

“Ah? It’s nothing much, probably just that I ate too many peanuts.”

“…I actually lost to peanuts.”

The silver-haired, green-eyed sister sat on top of Kamijou, and depressingly lowered her head. After carefully thinking about it, a girl wearing only a shirt and sitting on top of a guy wasn’t something that happened in everyday life. Kamijou could feel something very soft on his stomach, but Index was so far gone in her anguish to care about it right now.

“Uu… Touma is actually the kind of guy that gets excited over peanuts. But don’t worry, I can still accept Touma being this kind of person.”

“Oi, can you please not twist things around like that?” Kamijou sighed and said, “Anyway, please get off me, I want to stop my nosebleed. Or just give me new tissues; I don’t want to put the used tissues back into my nose.”

“Tissue, tissue… Touma, where is it?”

Index looked left and right but seemed to not see the box of tissues next to her. She sat on top of Kamijou and, tilting her head slightly, thought for a moment.

After a while, she seemed to think of something, and said, “Touma, Touma, this is paper, too.”

“Are you kidding me!? Sticking copy paper that hard into my nose will definitely hurt the inside of it. Just move off me, Index, I’ll get the tissues—"

Halfway through, the sound was suddenly cut off from Kamijou’s mouth.

Wearing a shocked expression, he stared at the words on the paper that Index had passed over.

“Ah… eh? Wait, what does it say on here?”

“Eh? Let me have a look… It says ‘Summer Vacation Homework Math Problems’. Touma, can’t you read that well?”

Kamijou’s thought process completely froze.

That was right, homework. Summer vacation homework. This summer vacation had been very dramatic and fantasy-like for Kamijou to the point where it had been like a show. But of all his memories, not one of them had been dealing with the biggest obstacle: "summer vacation homework"…

With a thud, Kamijou, who still had the girl on top of him, turned his head around. In his sideways view, looking at the clock and calendar on the wall, he could clearly see the time and date.

August 31st, 12:25 in the morning.

There was roughly 24 hours left until the end of summer vacation.

“…Haha, everyone must now think I’d say ‘such misfortune’, right? But once someone reaches the limit of being unlucky, not even something like that can be said. Haha… hahaha…”

“Touma, why is your tone of speech a bit weird? And who are you talking to?”

Chapter 1: A Certain Scientific One-Way Road.
Last_Order.

Part 1

August 31, 12:00 AM.

In an alley during midnight, the roars, shrieks, cries and sounds of things being devastated could be heard.

It was a long narrow straight alley, with both sides blocked by concrete walls. The buildings on both sides should be student dormitories.

In the alley, seven youths were panting heavily, and three were already down on the ground, bleeding.

The seven youths were holding onto things like switchblades, batons, and tear gas canisters. Though those were all devastating weapons, the people holding them didn't seem to be proficient enough to use them, giving one the feeling that they just took them out from a plastic bag or something. Since those things were weapons, no, maybe it was because amateurs were wielding them that those things were extremely dangerous.

The seven youths surrounded the one boy.

Their eyes were bloodshot.

However, the boy who was being surrounded didn't do anything.

To the boy, the seven armed people surrounding him didn't seem to exist in his sight. He just looked up at the night sky that was cut into a long strip as he stood around looking like he was pondering about something.

The boy seemed to have come back from a convenience store, as he was holding onto a plastic bag with a shop brand on it. The plastic bag was swaying about, and there were more than ten cans of something like coffee in that fully filled bag.

The impression that the boy gave was white, white, white.

But what gave a larger impression was the title of being the strongest Level 5 in Academy City.

The boy named Accelerator casually thought.

What was the significance of him fighting against that Level 0?

“HAAAHH!!”

Another delinquent rolled onto the floor, crying in pain.

One of the delinquents surrounding Accelerator thrust a knife at his back, but Accelerator didn't even give a look back. The delinquent exerted all his weight onto the sharp point of the knife as he attacked at that seemingly defenseless, weak back. He had taken part in the experiment that had used the twenty thousand Sisters to evolve himself into a Level 6, and this was the result.

How did this defeat change the world?

BAM!

The sound of a bone breaking could be heard from behind Accelerator.

Of course, that devastation didn't come from Accelerator's body. The delinquent who charged at his back with a knife had his wrist broken. The reflection ability that was exerted onto the blade of the knife had caused the slender wrist holding it to break, as it had been unable to withstand that force.

“AAAHHHHH!!!”

Another delinquent's cry could be heard.

The delinquent grabbed his hand as he rolled about on the dirty ground. It looked

almost comical.

Seemed like from that moment, the boy was no longer considered the strongest in Academy City.

He was one of the seven Level 5s in Academy City, with the ability to redirect all sorts of vectors, whether they be kinetic energy on the skin, heat energy, electrical energy or anything else, and that hadn't changed at all.

Their comrade's voice seemed to have become a trigger and the six remaining youths charged forward.

But was there really anyone amongst them who thought that they could win?

Their eyes were bloodshot.

But that seemed to be due to extreme nervousness, insecurity, fear and anxiousness.

Ever since that battle, Accelerator had been attacked from all directions, whether day or night.

The legend that he was the strongest in Academy City was broken, that was what everyone who attacked him believed.

Amongst the roars, the knives and batons started to swing, but Accelerator ignored them.

He lazily let his arms drop, not doing anything, just waiting for the enemy to defeat themselves.

All the forces of the savage youths attacks would be redirected and concentrated on their complicated but weak wrist bones.

But like the rest, those people seemed to realize something.

The moment they had failed the first time, they realized that the legend of Academy City's strongest still existed.

The sounds of the savage youths breaking their bones could be heard. They let

out cries of agony and rolled onto the floor, but Accelerator continued to ignore them.

At that moment, one of the youths used a psychic power at Accelerator. Why had he waited until now to use it? Maybe he realized that it was too dangerous to use normal physical attacks, or maybe his own remaining bit of conscience had caused him not to use it until the end.

But the number of attacks never decreased.

No matter how many times he beat the enemies, no matter how many times he proved his power, he couldn't break the label those idiots had stuck on him.

Accelerator didn't know what kind of power it was that the savage youth just let out, but naturally it was redirected; it was just that simple.

The youth who had his attack redirected seemed shocked, and the next second, he took the full brunt of the attack he had been so confident in and rolled away on the ground. However, since he was not dead, it seemed like he was somewhere around a Level 2.

Accelerator pondered.

After that battle with the Sisters and the Railgun, how had Accelerator changed?

Had Accelerator gotten weaker, or stronger? Or rather, that nameless Level 0, had he gotten weaker, or stronger?

“Hm?”

Accelerator suddenly noticed the commotion surrounding him had disappeared.

At that moment, he turned his eyes away from the long stretch of the night sky and looked around. The people who had stubbornly surrounded Accelerator had defeated themselves, and they were lying peacefully on the dirty ground.

With the blood splatters, maybe the word 'sleeping' was too much of an understatement, but at least no one had died. To have fought Accelerator head on and still be able to remain alive could be considered a miracle in itself.

Looking back, the ten youths who had attacked Accelerator were on the ground, but Accelerator hadn't done anything, let alone fight.

To him, the scenario was such that he just went to a convenience store to buy canned coffee and wanted to go home—that was how it was to him. He didn't intend to deal the finishing blow to them as well. He could kill those he could kill tomorrow, and those he could kill tomorrow, he could kill them one year later. It was stupid to be serious with those people. This was different from that experiment, no matter how hard he tried, he wouldn't be able to reach the end. How was swimming endlessly different from drowning?

“Eh...that's not right. If it were the old me, I wouldn't have let off those people who challenged me so easily. I really have changed, but how? What's the situation now? What happened?”

Accelerator tilted his head and pondered.

After experiencing battles where he won and lost, a one-sided victory was no longer able to satisfy him—such a conclusion was way too idealistic. Anyone who could recall being beaten up happily was most definitely a masochist.

“Hm...”

Accelerator folded his arms in front of his chest. The canned coffee in the bag started to sway about. There were more than ten of them, and they were all of the same brand. Whenever he found a coffee brand he liked, Accelerator would continue to drink it until he got sick of it less than a week later. The he'd switch brands and continue the pattern.

(What's going on? Why am I so unmotivated?)

He again looked up at the long stretch of the night sky. At this moment, around seven or eight levels above him, he heard an angry girl's shouts.

“CAN’T POSSIBLY...AT ALL!? I’M STILL A GIRL...THOSE KINDS OF

THOUGHTS...I STILL HAVE... PRIDE AS A GIRL!!”

As it was midnight, that voice could be heard very loudly.

What the heck, a lovers' squabble? Accelerator thus redirected that excessive noise, the air vibrations away from his ears. If he had done that a few seconds later, he would have heard the familiar painful cry of that Level 0.

The reflection ability could be done unconsciously through some simple calculations. He just needed to calculate the minimum required forces (gravity, air pressure, light, oxygen, heat, sound wavelength, etc.) and redirect everything else. If he really redirected all forces, he would be tossed out of the atmosphere because gravity was redirected.

After Accelerator re-calibrated the noise that was transmitted to him, he walked out of the alley and arrived at the road. He continued to look up at the sky; there was no need to look forward because he didn't need to notice any obstacles. With the reflection ability of his, his body wouldn't be hurt at all.

But it was because of this that Accelerator failed to notice something.

Someone was following Accelerator closely from behind, shouting their vocal chords out.

“Ah?”

Accelerator continued to walk forward as he turned to look behind.

It was a strange person. First, their attire was very weird. The person was completely covered in a dirty towel. The light blue towel, which looked like the cloak of a mysterious organization, covered this person's body and face completely. Of course, Accelerator couldn't tell what the person was wearing inside.

Also, the person was extremely short. Accelerator couldn't be considered tall, but this person was only as tall as his stomach. This person looked like they were a ten-year-old boy or girl. Considering the average age for a vagrant, this person was a little too young. However, 80% of the city inhabitants were students, so it was not completely true that there were no vagrants around.

The little towel monster seemed to be shouting something at Accelerator.

“—!.....——, ———. .....!?”

But since their voice was redirected, Accelerator couldn't hear anything. He casually looked up at the sky and tried to shut the reflection down.

A high-pitched yet calm sounding voice of a girl reached Accelerator's ears.

“—Ara ara, it's somewhat refreshing too even though Misaka is ignored. Speaking of which, if it was deliberate, why are you walking so naturally? Is this person someone really dense? ponders Misaka as Misaka tilts her head.”

This girl was standing only about ten centimeters from Accelerator. Anyone who understood Accelerator and saw this would have desperately pulled the girl away from him, or would have abandoned the girl's life, thinking that it was useless to try to save her now.

That boy could kill people with just a single finger. The girl, who was only ten centimeters away from him, was no different from someone who put her head into a lion's mouth.

But even after a few moments, there was no bloodbath.

The girl was still standing around carefully.

Accelerator frowned slightly. His power was able to change the vector of anything he touched, which in other words meant that he wouldn't hurt anyone no matter how close they were, as long as they didn't touch him.

Reflection was merely reflection, it could only hurt people with ill intent.

Anyone who didn't mean ill wouldn't be hurt.

“...How boring.”

“Though he's muttering, the distance between us continue to increase. Can't this person see Misaka? Or did he treat Misaka as a pixie? Hello, Misaka is here! exclaims Misaka as Misaka tries her best to emphasize her existence but was completely ignored!?”

Accelerator tilted his stiff neck left and right as he headed towards his house.

The girl who was being ignored seemed somewhat panicky as she exclaimed, “Hello! Misaka is here—eh? Does this person treat Misaka as something invisible? says Misaka as Misaka tilts her head and tries to fulfill the Misaka style...hm? How many Misaka did Misaka just say? wonders Misaka as Misaka's brain is all confused now.”

“Hold on...did you just call yourself Misaka?”

Accelerator suddenly stopped. The girl in the towel seemed rather happy as she walked forward in small steps. However, Accelerator couldn't see her expression, so he couldn't confirm her feeling.

“Oohh! This person finally acknowledged Misaka's existence, says Misaka as Misaka's feeling proud of it. So the saying 'I think, therefore I am' is a lie, since there's somebody else acknowledging Misaka's own existence besides Misaka's own view, says Misaka as Misaka completely denies her half-understanding of the saying 'I think, therefore I am'.”[2]

“That's enough, shut up and take off that towel that's covering you entirely. Show me your face.”

“Eh? Eh...erm...erm...isn't it too bold for a girl to take off her clothes in the middle of the streets? This is a little too crazy—that—says Misaka as Misaka confirms it again, are you for real?”

“...”

“Wah, he's not saying anything at all! This person is looking extremely serious! Please don't take off this towel because what's underneath isn't suitable to be seen woahhhh...”

The girl was no longer speaking calmly at the last moment, but it was too late. The towel that was covering her head was pulled down and away.

—Accelerator first saw her face.

She had a similar face as the Radio Noise Sisters Accelerator was familiar with. However, the Sisters were all designated at fourteen years old, and this girl

looked about ten. The girl seemed shocked as her eyes widened. This expression was also completely different from the Sisters.

—Then, her shoulders.

The girl's clothes had a rather exposed design. Her body was also like a ten year old, as her collarbones were extremely slender, looking like they would break anytime.

—He then saw her exposed chest.

—And then her exposed abdomen.

—And finally her exposed legs.

“Ah? What's this?—What's the situation now?”

Holding onto the towel, Accelerator inadvertently froze. If anyone who was familiar with him saw this, they would have frozen for a moment and then started rolling on the floor laughing.

Basically, the girl wasn't wearing anything underneath.

Maybe the girl couldn't grasp the situation quickly as she was unable to react, and she stood around blankly.

Basically, there was a completely naked girl in front of Accelerator.

Part 2

August 31st 12:25 AM.

The girl cried as she demanded her towel back, and Accelerator finally threw the dirty towel back to her. The girl grabbed the towel and immediately wrapped herself up in the towel discreetly. She then started to mention the request nobody had asked to hear.

“Misaka's serial number is 20001, the last Sister that was created, says Misaka as Misaka explains everything. Misaka's code name is the easy-to-understand Last Order, and Misaka was used in the experiment, says Misaka as Misaka grumbles.”

“Oh.”

Accelerator completely ignored her as he continued to increase the distance between them.

Last Order finally caught up to him and said, “But like everyone knows, the experiment ended midway through, and Misaka didn't even finish her body adjustments, says Misaka as Misaka continues to explain. The Misaka that was created midway through and thrown out of the incubator looks a lot smaller than a normal Misaka, so says Misaka as Misaka...are you listening?”

“And what do you want me to do?”

Accelerator asked as he walked on.

According to reports, the Sisters had been sent to other organizations after the experiment had ended, but since there were almost ten thousand of them, it was likely that a few Sisters may have been ignored. If so, she was wandering on the streets because of management lapses and had no place to go?

At that moment, the homeless girl with a ten-year-old appearance dragged her towel and said, “You're a key person to the experiment, so you should have some sort of link with the researchers. If possible, I hope that you can help me contact these researchers, says Misaka as Misaka thinks. Right now, Misaka's body and personality is incomplete, so she's really unstable. If possible, Misaka hopes that Misaka can enter the incubator again and complete the process, explains Misaka as Misaka puts two hands together, tilts her head and gives a cute look as she begs you.”

“Find someone else.”

“WAH! A QUICK REFUSAL! exclaims Misaka as Misaka gives up. But Misaka has no other people to rely on, so Misaka will never give up.”

“...”

Accelerator sighed.

(What's with her?)

He was a killing monster. He had killed over ten thousand Sister clones that had been created from Misaka Mikoto's genes. The Sisters could share a common memory through their brains, so this 'Last Order' should have been aware of that.

Maybe Last Order didn't have any neural link functions because she was incomplete? Besides, there was another suspicious point. The Sisters personalities were of a learning type, but Last Order's personality was a whole lot different from the Sisters. However, looking at the Sisters personalities, it was hard to tell which were incomplete.

Accelerator was feeling irritated by the girl in front of him who was trying to act all familiar with him, thinking that since the Sisters in the experiment had nothing to do with his safety, the girl in front of him should be like them.

Part 3

August 31st 12:51 AM

Through an alley off the road and down a few narrow lanes, they finally arrived at a five-story student dorm. The surrounding buildings were more than ten levels tall, and in contrast, this student dormitory had a dark and damp feeling. It seemed like the damp air had sunk deeply into the concrete of the entire building.

“Wah! Your place is really good, says Misaka as Misaka can't help but praise.”

“Are you mocking me?”

“It's a good thing to have your own room and a place that belongs to you, explains Misaka as Misaka's eyes widen.”

The barefooted brat that continued to follow Accelerator, Last Order, didn't have any ill intent on her face. Accelerator ignored her as he walked into the building and climbed the concrete stairs that were in disrepair.

At that moment, there was the sound of a towel being dragged.

Accelerator, while climbing up the stairs and without turning back, said, “Oi, how long are you going to follow me...”

“Sorry to bother you! says Misaka as Misaka takes the first move.”

“...”

“Thank you for your hospitality! says Misaka as Misaka hopes for three meals and snacks and nap time!”

Anyway, she probably wished that Accelerator would provide her with lodging and food before they contacted the researchers of the experiment.

“Sigh...” Accelerator shook his head as he sighed.

“Choose, take the stairs down or be chucked off the handrail.”

“WAH! Misaka is an idiot for thinking that you softened your stance! says Misaka as Misaka uses her fist to knock her head gently. But if Misaka leaves you now, Misaka may be unable to contact you. And it's dangerous for a girl to live on the streets, so Misaka can't back away, says Misaka as Misaka tries to explain what she meant.”

After reaching the third level, Accelerator moved away from the stairs and arrived at the corridor. At that moment, Last Order ran in front of Accelerator and turned to face him, stretching her arms out to block him.

“Which is your room? asks Misaka as Misaka tries to ask.”

“None of your business.”

“Which room? Which room? asks Misaka as Misaka completely ignores other people and continues to ask you who has zero communication skills.”

“...Seems like you're an idiot who won't shut up until you meet the coffin, huh?”

Hearing Accelerator mock her, Last Order didn't reply. However, she was not lacking words, but deliberately shutting her mouth to create a small space in the conversation, causing both sides to remain silent.

After a while, Last Order finally said something.

She narrowed her eyes and said, calmly and slowly, “Electromagnetic sounds detected. Wavelength at 3100 Hertz. Detecting situation, at this moment, there are five people armed with unknown dangerous objects, says Misaka as Misaka honestly reports. That may be your room, says Misaka as Misaka gives a warning.”

“...What?”

Accelerator narrowed his eyes. Like what had happened in the alley, Accelerator had been attacked by countless delinquents. There was still a possibility that the enemy may be lying in ambush in his room.

“Hurry up and say it, hurry up and say it, what number is your room? asks

Misaka as Misaka tries to ask.”

Accelerator pondered for a while, and said, “Room 304.”

“Ah, seems like that's the one, says Misaka as Misaka points her finger at the door. Misaka will go look! Excuse me! says Misaka as Misaka doesn't forget her manners.”

Last Order continued to rattle off as she walked towards room 304. She had just said that there were intruders, and yet she didn't look wary at all.

She reached her hand out to grab the handle in front of her, and opened the door. The electric lock seemed to be opened by her ability. Last Order seemed rather satisfied with her skills as she happily entered the room. Accelerator glanced at her, and then ignored her as he headed to his own room door.

After a while, from the room behind Accelerator, there was the sound of the TV airing a late night show, the angry growls of the room's owner and Last Order sounding rather calm as she apologized.

After that, Accelerator heard the sound of a loud 'BAM' as the door closed, and Last Order took huge strides as she caught up to Accelerator.

“That completely looked like someone else's room, says Misaka as Misaka remains extremely angry. So you're someone who likes to play such pranks, protests Misaka as Misaka's eyes wells up with tears. But it seems like you aren't listening to Misaka at all, right?”

“Shut up. It's not easy to trick me. What 3100 MHz? That's a microwave unit, right?”

“Uu...the microwaves can also be used on radar and many communication signals, so your reply is meaningless, says Misaka as Misaka tries her luck as she retorts.”

As for whether that was a lie, Last Order didn't deny it. Accelerator snorted impatiently.

“How can my room be room 304? Can't you tell from the door sign?”

“Misaka also doesn't know your real name, says Misaka as Misaka tries to retort.”

“Same here.”

“Ah, we actually had a common idea, that's a miracle, says Misaka as Misaka tries to use this to ask, what is your room number? asks Misaka as Misaka opens her mouth to ask.”

“Room 307.”

“Yay!”

Last Order sounded rather calm as she forcefully opened the door. Ten seconds later, she found that she had walked into someone else's room again, and could only lower her head dejectedly as she followed behind Accelerator.

“Uu, why must you be such a meanie? asks Misaka as Misaka remains dejected. Even if your room is messy, Misaka won't mind at all, says Misaka as Misaka explains.”

Accelerator ignored her as he walked to his own room, room 311. But then he stopped.

Something was not right.

“Oi oi, what's going on?”

First, the door was missing.

Looking inside the ajar door, the room was in complete disarray.

There were not just a large number of footprints on the floor, everything in the room was thoroughly decimated. The wallpaper and floor were peeled, the shoe shelf was shattered, there were burn marks left in the kitchen, indicating that someone had set fire to it, the TV was hacked in half, the bed was broken, the cotton in the sofa was ripped out.

It seemed like the room had been attacked while Accelerator went out. Since the attackers found that their target wasn't at home, they had vented their frustrations

on the room, causing it to become like this.

“Wah! Seems like something big and bad happened, says Misaka as Misaka is rendered speechless.”

Hearing Last Order say that no-brainer, Accelerator smirked.

“Seems like your lie became true.”

Seeing the scene in front of him, for a moment, just a moment, Accelerator inadvertently stopped breathing.

Basically, this was his limit.

Though his power could defend himself thoroughly, he couldn't protect anything else.

“...Such stupidity.”

Accelerator didn't even take off his shoes as he walked into his own house. His soles seemed to crush some plastic scrap of a household appliance. Accelerator didn't really feel anything about his home becoming like this, as he walked towards the sofa with cotton spilled out all over it and lay down.

“Eh...eh...eh...about...this...is there no need to notify Anti-Skill or Judgment? asks Misaka as Misaka nags.”

“So what if we notify them?”

Accelerator sighed. Maybe the culprits who did this would be caught, but that wouldn't prevent Accelerator from being attacked. Tomorrow, two days later, more people would come looking for him.

“Then what do you intend to do? You can stay if you don't mind living with the remains of the TV and the fridge, but to be honest, this isn't much different from lying down in a slum to sleep.”

He casually concluded that about his own home.

“And there are many broken pieces of glass here, I don't think your feet can

handle stepping on them, right? Ha, may be safer to sleep on the roads than here.”

“Um...but Misaka still wishes to bother you, says Misaka as Misaka makes this request.”

“Ah? Why?”

“Because I hope to have someone accompany me, says Misaka as Misaka answered without thinking.”

“...”

Accelerator just remained silent and didn't say anything else.

He looked dumbfounded as he stared at the ceiling.

“Then I'll be intruding! Ah, that table actually remained unscathed despite all this, says Misaka as Misaka points at the table. Misaka decides to sleep on that table...ah...em...for safety reasons, attacking Misaka when Misaka is sleeping is unacceptable, says Misaka as Misaka...”

“Just sleep.”

“Ah! Though Misaka got assured of safety, Misaka still feels some agony, says Misaka as Misaka says this.”

Accelerator shut his eyes. In the darkness, he could hear Last Order treading about. Maybe she wasn't used to the dusty air in the room, as Last Order coughed a few times.

Last Order felt abnormally tired.

Thinking about it, he finally concluded.

(What the heck—)

In that gentle darkness, Accelerator was like a child who couldn't resist the sleep monster as he casually thought.

(—Thinking about it, how many years has it been since I last heard this kind of

innocent voice?)

He pondered.

Part 4

August 31st 11:35 AM

The light that shone into the room caused Accelerator to wake up.

This student dormitory was surrounded by tall buildings, so the amount of sunlight his room could receive in a day was limited. It was about noon now, Accelerator pondered. At this moment, he found a face staring at him.

A curious-looking Last Order.

“Ohh! So y'all people will become direct when y'all sleep—says Misaka as Misaka tries to talk in a fake Kyoto-ben. Hm, you always looked like that, so you look very different from a kid when you sleep. But this is especially charismatic, says Misaka as Misaka—”

“...”

Accelerator sleepily reflected all the voices around his ears.

“—reveals a SMILE WOOAAHHH!!? EXCLAIMS MISAKA AS MISAKA'S VOICE GOT LOUDER!!!”

It was as if someone just stood right beside her and roared into a loudspeaker and Last Order inadvertently fell back. She covered her ears and shook her head about as she continued to try and talk to Accelerator with much enthusiasm.

“...”

Accelerator slowly reached his arms out and rubbed his eyes, slowly and weakly.

He stared blankly at Last Order for a while, and then said, “Blanket, blanket.”

“Eh? Are you dazed? asks Misaka as Misaka...KYAAAHHH! HOLD IT, DON'T TAKE THIS TOWEL! MISAKA SAID BEFORE THAT THIS IS MISAKA'S TREASURE...!”

“I'm so sleepy.”

Having grabbed a sleeping item, Accelerator snuggled under the towel like a bedworm as he again sunk into dreamland.

Part 5

August 31st 2:05 PM.

Hungry, Accelerator woke up.

Looking up at the clock that was swaying about, he found that it was already past 2. It was already past lunchtime, and just as Accelerator intended to get up and look for something to eat, he found a dirty towel wrapped around his body.

“W-what is...so you're still around...? Why are you wrapped in a tablecloth and looking so depressed?”

“...You were sleeping as if you were dead, Misaka couldn't wake you up no matter what Misaka did, says Misaka as Misaka feels really depressed about her own uselessness.”

Last Order was using a tattered tablecloth to wrap around her body as she sat down weakly on the floor. She looked like a pitiful person who wasted her entire fortune on lottery tickets, yet didn't win at all.

Accelerator's reflection wouldn't be interrupted even when sleeping. Sometimes, he would even redirect the sound to sleep better, and then nothing would wake Accelerator.

“Uu...uuu...Misaka tried to ask that you return the towel to Misaka. That blue towel lived together with Misaka, it's Misaka's good companion, and nothing can replace it, says Misaka as Misaka tries to let out a crying attack.”

Of course, Accelerator didn't want the dirty and tattered cloth. He tossed it onto Last Order's head, who was sitting on the floor, and then casually glanced at the kitchen.

Accelerator wasn't in the habit of cooking his own food, but there should be some frozen food in the freezer. However, looking through the entrance to the kitchen, Accelerator, who was sitting on the sofa, gave up and lay down. The freezer had already been tossed out, and the packaging of the frozen food was damaged and scattered all over the floor.

At that moment, Last Order, who switched from the tablecloth to the towel, seemed to recover and she said, “Good morning, though the time should be good afternoon, says Misaka as Misaka lowers her volume to say hello. Misaka is hungry, so if you can cook some food for Misaka, Misaka's happiness index will increase by thirty points...”

“Go and sleep.”

“Wah, the intimacy value and calories intake are both zero, says Misaka as Misaka raises her arms high. But this isn't to cheer but to surrender, I hope you can understand, says Misaka as Misaka earnestly and politely adds on. It's morning now, MORNING, MORNING!”

“...What morning, it's already 2 PM now.”

Having just woken up, Accelerator had to open his eyes. He was hungry, but what made it harder for him to sleep was this Last Order in front of him. Though he could redirect the sound, it was like putting on an eyepatch when bugs were flying around, the uncomfortable feeling couldn't be removed. Accelerator got off the sofa and stood up, intending to get rid of the kid as soon as he filled her slightly hungry stomach. Thus, he headed to the door.

“Eh? Isn't the kitchen over there? asks Misaka as Misaka points at the correct direction.”

“Why must I cook for you? Do I look like someone who'll do something like that?”

“Eh? But Misaka was really looking forward to seeing Accelerator unexpectedly put on an apron and put on a domestic man side, says Misaka as Misaka is really disappointed. Ah? Wait up, you didn't even reply to what I said! Are you completely ignoring Misaka now? says Misaka as Misaka can't help but start to snivel, but you still continue to ignore Misaka.”

Accelerator wordlessly left the door as Last Order continued to rattle on and follow him.

Part 6

Aug 31st 2:35 PM

On August 31st, there was almost no one on the roads.

As 80% of the population were students, most of the people were holed up in their dorms, frantically trying to wrestle with their holiday homework. However, Accelerator and Last Order didn't have those issues to deal with.

He brought the young girl down the almost empty streets.

The girl was dragging the light blue towel along as she walked beside the white haired boy.

“Is your hair color natural? asks Misaka as Misaka tries to ask.”

Last Order asked Accelerator that just as they approached a certain restaurant-chain shop.

“What?”

“Your hair, Misaka points her finger at the hair. A normal person's hair can't be purely white, says Misaka as Misaka raises her suspicions. And your red eyes don't seem normal in a biological sense, says Misaka as Misaka tilts her head, feeling extremely puzzled.”

Though he could just ignore her question, she may continue to rattle on if he did that, so Accelerator decided to answer her question. After eating, he could just send that girl to the researchers or leave her on the streets. Thinking that he only needed to endure for a little longer, he could at least endure that trivial thing.

“This isn't natural. Maybe this is a side effect of my powers. I don't really understand it though. Whether it's my skin, hair or eyes, all the pigments on my body exist to protect my body from UV rays, but my powers can redirect any unwanted UV rays, so my body itself doesn't need pigments.”

Even Accelerator was feeling rather surprised that he could be so talkative. He often said some mocking words in the experiment; seemed like he could really be quite talkative.

“Oh, I see. So Misaka finds that Accelerator can still be talked with, says Misaka as Misaka is somewhat surprised.”

“What in the world do you mean by that? Speaking of which, it's not a good thing to have powers that are too strong. The outside influence is too little, it seems to cause a loss of balance in the hormones, causing me to have this androgynous appearance.”

“So are you a guy or a girl? asks Misaka as Misaka tries to uncover the truth.”

“Can't you tell?”

As Accelerator said that, he started to feel disbelief in regards to his own actions.

Looking at his past thought process now, the conversation he was having with Last Order was already an anomaly in itself. Of course, Accelerator was a member of this society, and he was not so savage that he would kill everyone he met, but he never had the experience of talking to the Sisters so successfully.

Normally, a conversation in the experiment often went like this:

"*—Yes, Misaka is Serial Number 10032, responds Misaka. However, shouldn't you check using the passcode to ensure that Misaka is part of the experiment? suggests Misaka.*"

"*—It is difficult to understand what you mean when you use vague terms such as 'anything', replies Misaka. The experiment begins in three minutes and twenty seconds. Are you prepared? asks Misaka to make sure.*"

That couldn't be a conversation with an ordinary person. It was like they were emotionless robots who were just answering the questions. And Accelerator himself just said this:

"*—Dammit, after ten thousand times, this is getting really fucking old. I was hoping to kill some time, but no. There's just no having a conversation with any of you.*"

From the beginning, he never felt that he could communicate successfully with the Sisters. Even up to the end, he really never managed to do so.

However...

It seemed like that battle did really change him, Accelerator thought.

The problem was, what changed?

Why?

What did it change?

"Hello? Hello hello hello? asks Misaka as Misaka tries to say hello to you. Your eyes are blank, are you thinking of anything? asks Misaka as Misaka stares intently at your face."

"AH? I'm just wondering whether you could enter the restaurant with just a towel around you."

"...Uuu, if Misaka's the only one left outside, what should Misaka do? asks Misaka as Misaka feels extremely worried."

“GO sleep.”

“Wah! That almost became your catchphrase, exclaims Misaka as Misaka starts to feel like she should give up.”

Last Order raised her arms and swung them around wildly while remaining expressionless, and Accelerator ignored her as he lifted his head up to look at the afternoon sky.

He finally managed to communicate.

Something invisible was changing.

Part 7

“Welcome, is it just the two of you?”

In the end, the waitress smiled as she invited the towel girl in. Of course, there was a somewhat stiff look on her smiling face. It seemed like this person was a part-time worker, and she couldn't handle something that wasn't mentioned in the manual.

Accelerator and Last Order chose to sit near the window. In Academy City, 80% of the population were students, and normally, August 31st was a day where people were normally stuck in their houses finishing up their holiday homework. There might have been crowds during lunchtime, but it was already past lunchtime now.

Accelerator casually looked outside a window. At that moment, he saw a white-cloaked person keeping his body down as he walked on the road.

“Ah?”

The moment the man noticed Accelerator looking at him, he acted like he had

gotten an electric shock, and he scurried into a parked sports-car in the parking lot.

“That guy...isn't that Amai Ao?”

Accelerator muttered. Last Order looked puzzled as she lifted her eyes away from the menu.

Amai Ao was a researcher who was about thirty years old. He was a long-term assistant in the Level 6 research. The experiment that had been calculated and simulated through a supercomputer was deemed to be flawed, and was now in temporary limbo. The researchers of the experiment should be going through the vast amount of information now, trying to find out where the problem occurred...

“That guy...what's he doing here...?”

“What are you looking at? What are you thinking of? What are you talking about? asks Misaka as Misaka tries to inquire.”

“Stop spouting nonsense. Think of it, what is the most important thing to you now?”

“Eh? Eating, replies Misaka as Misaka doesn't even think about it. Ah, are you saying that Misaka can order anything today no matter what? says Misaka as Misaka feels really excited about it.”

“Hm, I don't really care about it all of a sudden.”

What happened to the initial idea of contacting the researchers? Accelerator couldn't help but lament. Right now, Amai's sports-car had already vanished onto the roads, and Last Order hadn't noticed this at all as she rubbed below her eyes, her body swaying about.

“Uuu...no matter what I do recently, Misaka feels rather tired.”

“Not my problem.”

Accelerator randomly ordered some food from the waitress who served some plain water, only to find that Last Order, who was sitting directly opposite him, was staring at him strangely.

“Ah...says Misaka as Misaka is carefully trying to choose how Misaka should say it...what should I say...so you can order food and pay like an ordinary person. This really makes Misaka feel touched.”

“What?”

“Hm, Misaka originally felt that you're the kind that will kick the restaurant door down, finish up a king's meal and then break the windows to casually escape, trembles Misaka as Misaka says this honestly.”

“Oh, so you're talking about that.”

Accelerator nodded away lethargically.

“It's not that I can't do that, but now that the experiment is halted, I don't have any groups supporting me from behind, and I'll warrant too much unwanted attention if I exaggerate my movements.”

“Misaka already feels weird when you say it, says Misaka as Misaka can't help but butt in. Including Anti-Skill and Judgment, nobody can beat you, says Misaka as Misaka honestly says her thoughts. Speaking of which, it's really unbelievable that you would follow the orders of the researchers in the experiment, says Misaka as Misaka tilts her head.”

“I say...”

Accelerator sighed, and then continued.

“Do I need to explain it? Okay, let's assume that I create a ruckus in this restaurant. Okay, let's assume that I ate a king's meal. Now, who's my first enemy?”

“Eh, should be the worker, says Misaka as Misaka tries to answer.”

“That's right, so I killed the worker instantly. Just an instant. Who's next? The boss? I only need a moment just to kill him. Anti-Skill next? Or Judgment? Those people are easier to handle; the more powerful the enemy's equipment, the stronger the reflection. Then...what next? It'll become something that Academy City can't handle, so they will ask for help from outside? But that's nothing, just some police, assault squads or armored squads. Thus, Japan couldn't handle it,

foreign forces, special forces, assassination squads appear, and they couldn't handle me. Will it be an air raid? Will it end up with nuclear missiles all over the place?”

Accelerator then continued.

“How does that benefit me?”

Even if he won in a world war with nuclear missiles flying everywhere, if all the humans in the world died, Accelerator could only live on like a primitive person. If he wanted to live like a human, he had to live among humans.

That was the problem for a person with the power to destroy. Accelerator thought, maybe it was the same feeling as a president with his hand on a nuclear missile launch button.

“UU...do you normally talk like a machine gun? asks Misaka as Misaka is surprised.”

“Same as you.”

“No no, according to the information that was forced into my head, the world should have some sort of place like school, says Misaka as Misaka tilts her head and ponders. Can someone like you who has zero communication skills mix around in a class? says Misaka as Misaka again tries to ask.”

“Oh, that isn't a problem, I don't have classmates anyway.”

“?”

“I'm a student in a special class, even though I don't know if it's a good thing or a bad thing,” Accelerator casually said.

Ever since the power development course had caused his ability to awaken, he was drafted into a special class. He was the only one in the class. He didn't need to attend a sports meet, nor did he need to attend a culture festival. Though there were almost two thousand students in his school, the cramped class he attended had only a table.

Accelerator wasn't really unhappy about it.

A long time ago, a researcher said this to Accelerator: because you're the strongest Level 5, this class is a special class for you to evolve into a Level 6. At that moment, Accelerator wondered: What will change when I'm no longer just the strongest? Will anything change after I evolve into an invincible person?

“Are you lonely? asks Misaka as Misaka wonders.”

“Ah?”

“Misaka is definitely unable to understand the loneliness of a strong person, and other people will definitely be unable to understand that, says Misaka as Misaka guesses, so—”

“Such a ridiculous question. What if I say yes? Are you going to pat my head and comfort me?”

Accelerator casually said that, and after he finished, what was left was an icy silence.

Accelerator was a killer who massacred more than ten thousand people, this was a fact that wouldn't change. Since he already made it till here, what 'nobody can understand his loneliness', what darkness, what comforting words, these didn't hold any meaning. Besides, his motive for participating in the experiment was probably that he wanted to find a way to vent his stress.

“__”

Was that so?

Accelerator frowned and tried to recall, was that really so?

If that were the case, it would have been too illogical, Accelerator thought. Something was not right, but Accelerator couldn't understand what was wrong. He recalled the events related to that experiment, and finally remembered the reason why he felt that something was wrong.

“*—Dammit, after ten thousand times, this is getting really fucking old. I was hoping to kill some time, but no. There’s just no having a conversation with any of you.*”

Yes, that was where it felt wrong.

If he really wanted to vent, if he really had wanted to massacre the Sisters like a punching bag, why had he tried to communicate with the Sisters?

In that experiment, the one who had continued to do such unnecessary things was Accelerator.

Though he hadn't been able to get through to them, it didn't mean that the Sisters weren't following their orders. The Sisters had just been flawlessly carrying out the experiment that was predicted, simulated and planned by the supercomputer.

If one viewed it from an experimental standpoint, Accelerator, who had gone against the rules to talk to the Sisters, was the one who had gone out of hand. In fact, during the experiment, no matter whether it was the Sisters or the researchers, none of them had talked with others.

If so, why had Accelerator done such a needless thing?

This was where it was illogical. If Accelerator and the Sisters' relationship was just to kill and to vent stress, why had he tried to talk to them?

The reason one communicated with others was because they normally wanted to become friends with someone. Accelerator thought that this wasn't logical. He was the one who had mocked, hurt, and massacred the Sisters.

“Ah, it's here, finally here, Misaka points at the waitress with her finger. Wah, says Misaka as Misaka's food is here.”

The waitress placed the food in front of Last Order; Accelerator's food seemed like it needed a longer time to prepare.

“Ohh, this is the first time Misaka's eating such a hot meal, says Misaka as Misaka feels really excited. This is great, the entire plate is giving off hot air, says Misaka as Misaka continues to stare at it.”

It had been several days since the experiment had been interrupted. If Last Order had left the research facility immediately after the experiment ended, during this time, her life...

“...Whatever.”

Accelerator casually said, not bothered at all.

He turned away from Last Order, who was in front of him, to outside the window. After a while, he couldn't hear Last Order eating at all. Accelerator started to feel puzzled and turned back to look. He saw Last Order sitting upright in front of the piping hot dish, looking back at his face, and not looking like she was intending to eat anytime soon. However, Last Order was just faking her calmness; anyone could see that she was ready to gobble up the food.

“What are you doing? Didn't you say that this is the first time you're eating hot food?”

“But it's Misaka's first time to be eating with someone, says Misaka as Misaka answers. Misaka recalls that everyone should say 'itadakimasu' before everyone starts eating, and Misaka wants to try that, says Misaka as Misaka tries to mention what she wishes for.”

Fifteen minutes later, Accelerator's food arrived.

The food in front of Last Order was no longer giving off hot air.

But the girl was still smiling.

Smiling really happily.

Part 8

August 31st 3:43 PM.

It had been a while since they walked into the restaurant, but Accelerator and Last Order finally started to eat.

Last Order couldn't even use the spoon and chopsticks well, let alone a fork and knife. For some reason, she stabbed the fork into the rice, tilting her head as she wondered.

Accelerator ordered meat, but as the meat was tough, and as the small metal board that was used to hold the meat didn't seem to fit the wooden plate holding it, it started to move about, and he couldn't cut the meat properly. He paused for a while, and then reached his hand out to grab the metal board properly, terrifying the waitress who just so happened to be walking by.

Accelerator could reflect all the heat, and so he wouldn't be scalded at all.

To everyone else who was watching, it was an incredible scene.

“Delicious delicious, says Misaka as Misaka gives this conclusion.”

“This is just frozen food; who knows how many weeks they stuffed those things in the storage.”

“But delicious food is still delicious, says Misaka as Misaka feels really contented.”

“...I say.”

Accelerator released the sizzling hot metal plate.

“I wanted to say something since yesterday. Do you have a screw loose or something? Don't you remember what I did to you people? Don't you feel painful, unbearable, tormented, and spiteful about this?”

Right before the experiment ended, when that Level 0 had rushed into the depot, the Sister (that Level 0 called her Misaka Imouto) had glared at Accelerator, seemingly giving him an antagonistic look.

Maybe the Sisters finally got that personality at that moment. And maybe that was just something that occurred in that Misaka Imouto.

“Hm...Misaka can use brainwaves to connect all 9969 Misaka's personalities together.”

“Ah? So what?”

“The connected brainwaves will form a mental network, says Misaka as Misaka tries to explain.”

“Like how humans can have a collective consciousness or something like that?”

“Hm...it's a little different, says Misaka as Misaka denies it. The brainwaves linking the Misaka units are like brain cells that have nerves being touched suddenly, says Misaka as Misaka gives an example. More accurately, the Misaka Network is like a huge computer that can control all the Misaka's, says Misaka as Misaka explains.”

Accelerator remained silent.

During this time, Last Order continued to explain.

“The death of a Misaka unit won't cause the Misaka Network to vanish, says Misaka as Misaka tries to explain. Using the human brain as an example, a Misaka is a brain cell. The brainwaves link is the nerves that link all the brain cells. When a brain cell vanish, the data of the memories and experience will vanish, which of course is a pity, but this doesn't mean that the Misaka Network will completely vanish, unless every Misaka is eliminated...”

Accelerator suddenly felt disgusted, as if he was being stared at by a large spider.

Of course, that didn't mean that Accelerator was afraid of the person in front of him. He could kill this Last Order instantly. There were only ten thousand Sisters; if he was willing to spend the time, he could kill them all.

But that was another thing altogether.

The fear lay deeper. That girl, who was trying her best to savagely fight against the food in front of her, now seemed like an alien that was of a completely different build from a human...

“—At least that was what Misaka thought, but Misaka seemed to change Misaka's mind.”

“?”

“Misaka learned something new, and that's a Misaka's value, says Misaka as Misaka is confident. It's not just Misaka as a whole, every Misaka unit's life is valuable. Nobody can replace a Misaka. If someone dies, someone will be crying, says Misaka as Misaka proudly declares what Misaka learned. So Misaka won't die, Misaka won't let another Misaka die, says Misaka as Misaka thinks.”

The girl said.

She was staring at Accelerator with an ordinary and human look.

That was a declaration.

A declaration that she would not forgive Accelerator for whatever he did.

A vengeful declaration that Last Order would never forget about this.

“Ha...”

Accelerator inadvertently let his back sink into the chair. He looked up at the ceiling and sighed.

That was the first time he actually felt like this.

He did have a vague feeling about it in the past, but he had never heard the person involved complain about it. Thus, this was the first time Accelerator felt such pain. And it wasn't until everything had ended, that he found out that the Sisters he had treated as toys were humans who could bring pain to others like this.

“__”

Accelerator opened his mouth and moved his lips, but he was unable to say anything.

He couldn't say a word.

"But Misaka is really grateful to you, says Misaka as Misaka explains. If it's not for you, the experiment wouldn't have started. The bottlenecked Radio Noise plan wouldn't have so much attention on it, says Misaka as Misaka continues. You're a savior and a killer, you're Eros and Thanatos, you're life and death—

says Misaka as Misaka is grateful, because you helped give life to the Misakas who didn't have any life."

Last Order said that.

With a gentle voice that accepted Accelerator.

However, that made it even more unbearable.

For some reason, he couldn't stand it.

“What is this?”

Accelerator muttered.

“This is completely illogical. Giving life to people and killing them, what kind of credit do I get? What are you thinking, why are you thanking me? No matter what, I voluntarily became a killing monster that enjoyed killing you people.”

“You're lying, says Misaka as Misaka concludes. You didn't want to join in the experiment, says Misaka as Misaka makes the hypothesis.”

That made Accelerator even more confused.

At this moment, it wouldn't have been strange if Last Order was crying and shouting. But she chose to speak to Accelerator, and that was completely illogical.

That inexplicable situation caused Accelerator to feel frustrated.

“Hold on, are you trying to casually rewrite your memories just to prove your point? No matter what you do, you can't possibly have this conclusion. Do I look like I was forced to do that? Since I continued to follow the directives of the experiment, it means that I don't give a damn about your lives, it's just that simple.”

Accelerator sounded like he was lecturing Last Order.

Why must he try so hard to lower himself? Accelerator started to wonder.

“It's not that, says Misaka as Misaka tries to retort. If that were the case, why did

you try to talk to Misaka throughout the experiment? asks Misaka as Misaka inquires.”

Last Order didn't sound panicky, remaining as calm as ever.

She sounded just like a gentle elder sister.

“Remember what you did, the situation you went through, says Misaka as Misaka tries to beg. You tried to talk to Misaka a few times, why is it so? says Misaka as Misaka asks a question that has such a clear answer.”

Accelerator sunk into silence.

He didn't even know the reason why he had wanted to talk to the Sisters.

“*—Ha ha! What’s with those fleeing hips? Why are you shaking your ass like that!? You’re just asking for it!!*”

“*—Well, I may have no right to say this as someone forcing you to take part in this experiment to make me stronger, but you sure are calm. Don’t you feel anything about this situation?*”

“*—Dammit, after ten thousand times, this is getting really fucking old. I was hoping to kill some time, but no. There’s just no having a conversation with any of you.*”

“*—Hah. What!? Are you just walking around casually without a plan? If you like pain that much, I’ll make you cry so much you might as well take a cough drop now!*”

“*—Now for a question. How many times have you been killed!?*”

“Think about it calmly, you words aren't too natural, says Misaka as Misaka analyzes further. The basis behind talking between people is to understand others and to make others understand oneself—which also means forming a relationship with others. In this experiment that only emphasizes killing, if you wanted to just let the experiment succeed, there's no need to have a conversation, says Misaka as Misaka makes her point.”

“...Ah? Those rough words don't sound like what one will say when someone

wants to create a relationship with others.”

“That's right, and that is the second point, says Misaka as Misaka raises two fingers. What you said are crude words that thoroughly despise Misaka, and those don't relate to building a relationship with others, says Misaka as Misaka continues on.”

Last Order finally said the most important point.

“But maybe you said those words because you wished to be refused?”

“Ah?”

Accelerator was stunned.

“Before the battles in the experiment started...you always said those words, says Misaka as Misaka recalls. It's as if you wanted to make Misaka afraid, to make Misaka unwilling to battle, says Misaka as Misaka depicts.”

“What?”

Accelerator gasped.

“But the Misakas couldn't understand what you were trying to say at all. Not even once, says Misaka as Misaka feels really regretful about it. If, just if that day, what would you do if Misaka said that she didn't want to fight? says Misaka as Misaka asks in regards to a choice that can't possibly be taken back again.”

“...”

At that moment, Accelerator felt like even his heart stopped.

That's right, if...

On that day, at that time, if the Sisters had said that they didn't want to continue the experiment, didn't want to be killed, what would Accelerator have done? Could he have done anything?

Of course he could.

There were no such problems. The experiment was aimed to evolve Accelerator

into a Level 6, so Accelerator himself was the main cog in the experiment. He just needed to say something like 'I don't want to cooperate', and they would stop the experiment. Nobody could replace him. Even if the researchers tried to force him by capturing him, they would be wasting their time.

Because he was the strongest esper in Academy City.

Because he was invincible, he could be called the strongest in Academy City.

If...

Just if, if he took action right at the beginning of the experiment.

At the initial stage, when no Sister had been sacrificed.

If twenty thousand Sisters had stood in front of him, looking fearful as they begged him not to do this...

What would he have done?

That was his wish.

That was why he had continued, and continued, and continued to ask. But no matter what, he couldn't get a response. In the long run, the way he had questioned became even more radical, until he had lost all sense and became a bloodthirsty murderer.

He had wanted someone to stop him.

He had wanted someone to have a reason to stand up against him.

Accelerator always wondered, after that experiment, after that battle at the depot, after that fight he had against that Level 0, what had changed? That question had troubled him for a long time, but maybe he could get the answer here.

He recalled that fight at the depot, that Level 0 who overcame all odds. In regards to that, he must have exaggerated it as much as he could. But even so, Accelerator still wondered.

What was he thinking about?

About what?

"...Damn it."

Just like that, he closed his eyes and lifted his head as he said that.

He just said that.

Right now, no sugar-coated words were going to convert him into a good guy. That had already been proven in the fight at the depot. At that moment, the Sisters who had been saved by the Level 0 had already understood that they should refuse to sacrifice themselves for the experiment, but Accelerator continued to insist on killing them. That was a cold, hard fact that wouldn't change.

Last Order remained silent. Accelerators wondered what expression was she showing now. Right now, he continued to close his eyes, close his eyes, close his eyes...after a while, he suddenly realized that something was not right.

It had been so long, and yet Last Order hadn't said anything.

Accelerator opened his eyes suspiciously. At this moment, he heard a heavy 'dong' sound. Last Order collapsed onto the table. Her head didn't hit the table though, as a spoon was stuck between the table and her neck.

Anyone could tell that she hadn't collapsed just because she wanted to sleep or was feeling tired. She didn't even have an ounce of strength in her. Though she was trying to suppress her breathing volume, she was panting as loud as a dog. It was as if she had a fever.

"Oi."

"Ah...haa."

Last Order had a thoroughly tired voice.

"Misaka wanted to contact the researchers before Misaka became like this, says Misaka as Misaka is dizzy and lets out a bitter smile."

"..."

"Misaka's serial number is 20,001, which is the last number, says Misaka as Misaka adds on. Misaka's body is still incomplete, so Misaka shouldn't be outside the incubator, says Misaka as Misaka sighs. But since Misaka managed to hang on, Misaka thought that it would be alright, but now..."

Last Order was talking very slowly now, maybe because her consciousness was wavering.

It was possible that if she lost consciousness, then she wouldn't be able to wake up again.

"Oi."

"—Hm? What is it what is it? asks Misaka as Misaka wonders."

Last Order responded three seconds later.

Even so, the girl was still smiling.

Accelerator's face gradually lost all expression, as if he had lost all emotions.

In that situation, he couldn't do anything. Even with the strongest power in Academy City, Accelerator was just the strongest esper in the city. His power couldn't save others. Even if someone asked him for help, he could only hide inside a power that was like a nuclear shelter. That was his power. He couldn't protect others, he couldn't save others, he could only live on alone, watching everything get destroyed silently. It was like this when his room was ransacked, and it was now like this when the girl collapsed in front of him.

"..."

Accelerator silently stood up. Last Order remained sprawled on the table, only looking at him.

"Eh? Where are you going? asks Misaka as Misaka questions. You haven't finished eating."

"Not hungry."

"Oh...Misaka wanted to try saying 'Gochisou-sama', says Misaka as Misaka

sighs."

"Really? That's a pity."

With a cold expression, Accelerator took the bill to the counter.

Leaving Last Order alone.

Part 9

August 31st 4:11 PM.

Accelerator was walking alone on the road.

He was still thinking about Last Order, who he left at the restaurant. But in that situation, there was nothing he could do to help. He was not some omnipotent savior, and he was not a detective in a novel. He had never lived a life where he could take care of any problem that came at him, and he couldn't solve every problem that happened just by thinking for a few seconds.

He couldn't do anything.

That was why he chose to leave, and not do anything.

Just like that.

Accelerator walked onto the road as he thought. Besides, no matter what, his personality wasn't suited to help others. The world he existed in wasn't like that. That Level 0 who fought against Accelerator at the depot should be suited for something like that.

"*—Ohh, this is the first time Misaka's eating such a hot meal, says Misaka as Misaka feels really excited. This is great, the entire plate is giving off hot air, says Misaka as Misaka continues to stare at it.*"

Besides, what could he do now? Did he have the right to do anything? He was the one who had dragged the Sisters into hell; he was also the one who caused the experiment to be abandoned and caused Last Order to be thrown out of the research facility. No matter what he did, what he chose, he would always end up hurting others. Such a person helping others would defy all logic.

“*—But it's Misaka's first time to be eating with someone, says Misaka as Misaka answers. Misaka as Misaka recalls that everyone should say 'itadakimasu' before everyone starts eating, and Misaka wants to try that, says Misaka as Misaka tries to mention what she wishes for.*”

He continued to walk on the road, through the crosswalk, past the convenience store, into an alley near a shopping mall, through the alley, past a student dorm, and he continued to walk on, and on, and on, and on, and on, and on.

"*—Oh...Misaka wanted to try saying 'Gochisou-sama', says Misaka as Misaka sighs.*"

Suddenly, he stopped.

Accelerator lifted his head up.

In front of him was a research facility.

The research facility that had started the experiment and mass-produced the Sisters. If this was the place, at least there should be incubators left for espers that were produced. Maybe he could adjust Last Order's incomplete body through those incubators.

He couldn't do anything to help at that place, which was why he had chosen to leave that place.

He came here to find something he could do.

Accelerator stepped into the research facility.

He knew that for someone like him to do such a thing was illogical. But even so, he wanted to save that girl.

August 31, 5:15 PM.

END

Chapter 2: A Certain Ojou's Railgun. *Doubt_Lovers.*

Part 1

August 31, 8:00 AM.

Within the psychic powers development institution Academy City, which had 2.3 million students, was Tokiwadai Middle School, a famous girls' school ranked among the top five schools in the city. Focusing on only raising elite students, the student numbers did not even reach two hundred. In the school, there were currently two Level 5 espers and forty-seven Level 4 espers. Also worthy of note was that one of the entry requirements for Tokiwadai Middle School was "Level 3 esper or above".

Even during summer vacation, the morning life didn’t change in the Tokiwadai dorms: wake up at seven in the morning, clean up to the level of "it doesn’t look too bad" within thirty minutes, roll call in the dining hall at seven-thirty, and finish breakfast by eight o’clock.

What was notable was the reason the dorms let students have until eight to finish breakfast: Tokiwadai Middle School encouraged students to take the school bus. The deadline before being late was 8:20 AM, so if one didn’t take the bus, they would have to sprint full-speed to school.

Today was August 31st; because it was still summer vacation, after 8 AM and aside from dinner, curfew, and lights-out time, students had leisure time. All across the world, students were now hurrying to finish their summer homework, but at Tokiwadai Middle School, that feeling of anxiety couldn't be felt in the slightest.

Misaka Mikoto, one of the Level 5 espers, was sitting in the majestic and also ridiculously spacious dining room, spreading her arms out and yawning widely.

Even though it was summer vacation, she was still in uniform. According to Tokiwadai's school rules, the dorms were still part of the school, so students were forbidden from wearing casual clothing inside the dorms. Mikoto had shoulder-length hair, a stubborn look, and a mouth that, once she started talking, wouldn't stop for twenty minutes, all of which were traits far from the "Ojou-sama" stereotype.

Then again, those weren't traits that belonged solely to Mikoto. The other female students around her had finished breakfast and were still sitting and chatting with each other; and, as a whole, they gave the same impression. Even though they had special circumstances, they were still middle school students in Japan. The classical Ojou-samas described in manga and novels with a hobby of equestrian riding and a specialty of the piano were extremely rare (on the other hand, those kind of people do still exist).

(Manga, manga… Oh, right, today's Monday.)

Mikoto suddenly remembered something, and stood up from her chair. Every Monday and Wednesday was when Mikoto stood at a corner store and read manga magazines. Though, she didn't know that her reading them left a lot of high school students able to buy only magazines with the edges messed up.

Normally, she went to the corner store and read manga only after school, but it was summer vacation, so she could go and do it right now. Mikoto wanted to know who the culprit was in a manga that had a closed-room murder, so she hurried and left early. Just when Mikoto was about to head off, a girl in a maid outfit who was gathering the cutlery realized her intentions. This girl was a middle school student in some home economics school who was working in the Tokiwadai Middle School girls' dorm for the purpose of gaining work experience. Practical work for the home economics school varied widely, and those that could get in to the Tokiwadai girl's dorms were supposedly the finest of the finest.

"Misaka, Misaka! Are you going to the corner store or the book shop?"

"Today's not the 10th, and it's a Monday, so it's the corner store. And Tsuchimikado, your role here is that of a practicing maid, after all; shouldn't you not be talking to me so familiarly?"[3]

“Misaka, Misaka! If you’re going to the corner store, then buy a kinda strange manga for me—the kind of shoujo manga that’s not R-18, but still has lurid descriptions.”

“Ah, I remember, your interest is BL[4], right? And Tsuchimikado, your role here is that of a practicing maid, after all; shouldn't you not be making your patrons run errands for you?”

“Misaka, Misaka! Men pushing down other men isn’t my hobby, but that of the head chef. I like the kind of manga where the brother and sister get into a messy relationship.”

“Wouldn’t that count as seinen manga and not shoujo, then? And, Tsuchimikado, your role here is that of a practicing maid, after all; shouldn't you not be admitting that you like your own brother?”

Misaka sighed, and walked out of the dining hall, past the excessively long corridor, and towards the main door. She came across no one else as most of the students were staying in the dining hall and chatting after eating breakfast.

Misaka went to the entrance hall, and opened the huge front doors.

From the student dorms and heading outside, the view changed from an old Western-style building to the street in a near-future fashion. There were no power lines; replacing them were wind power generator propellers at the end of every corner. Barrel-shaped security robots that automatically patrolled the streets came and went everywhere. A zeppelin with giant screens on its belly floated across the sky. The views of that "city" were different from those of a normal city, but for the residents there, it was already very familiar, and they could no longer tell the difference between the two.

Right across the student dorms that looked like a Western-style stone building was an "open 24 hours" general store. The difference between the two made Mikoto smile slightly. Just when Mikoto was about to take a step onto the road… suddenly a man’s voice came from the side.

“Ah, aren’t you Misaka-san? Good morning. Where would you be going? Eh, I remember that you’re not in any clubs, right? If you don’t mind, would you care to walk together with me for a while?”

“Uu!” Mikoto instantly stiffened, tried to hide the look of "met up with somebody extremely troublesome" on her face, and turned towards the direction of the voice.

In front of her was someone a year older than Mikoto, a tall and slim man. Though slightly thin, he had the body build of a sportsman. His hair was smooth and fine and, unlike a Japanese person, his skin was very white. A man that started exercising from the basics. That meant that even if he was holding a tennis racket or typing on a laptop keyboard, it would look fitting for him—really very advantageous. The sweat that came out of him almost seemed to sparkle, and his face nearly always had a warm smile… he was that kind of person.

Unabara Mitsuki.

He was one of the people that Mikoto found hard to handle, and also the grandson of the director of Tokiwadai Middle School. In Academy City, where the main goal was psychic powers development, the power of that position was like that of the ruling family of a major corporation. Tokiwadai Middle School was a girls' school, so Unabara Mitsuki couldn’t enter the school grounds or the dorms, but he was free to roam around everywhere else.

The reason Mikoto labeled him as a troublesome person wasn’t because he was someone that liked to show off his influence, though.

“Hmm, even though you’re not in a club, focusing on personal hobbies isn’t bad. Misaka-san, what kind of sports do you like? If you’re interested in tennis, equestrian riding, squash, or golf, you can tell me; in these areas, I may be able to give some pointers… eh? Are you alright? Are you feeling well?”

“Ah… It’s… it’s nothing.”

From Unabara’s tone, he really seemed to be worried; Mikoto couldn’t help but give a small sigh.

Unabara Mitsuki understood clearly what kind of enormous influence he could bring about, yet he never flaunted it. He always deliberately matched Mikoto’s values, talking to Mikoto as an equal. To Mikoto, the kind of "mature" personality that gauged the situation between the two made her feel rather uncomfortable. But since the other party was using a "mature" way to get close

to her, she couldn’t just deal with him the same way she did with the usual high school student and fire off a bolt of electricity as a response, because that would have made her feel like an immature child.

What made Mikoto feel like Unabara was hard to handle was that, whenever she met him, she always had to be careful and prudent. It didn’t feel like a meeting between friends, but rather like fawning to a senpai at a school club.

(Then again, this guy wasn't so bothersome a week ago, but recently, he comes to me on a daily basis… They say summer changes men… What a disagreeable way to change.)

Thinking about it carefully, in the past, they were only at a level where they would greet each other if they walked past each other. They might have stood together and chatted, but they wouldn’t have interfered with each other’s plans. Now was different; he had become very aggressive—almost like he was tracking Mikoto’s every move…

“Misaka-san?”

“Uu…” After Unabara called out, Mikoto had involuntarily shrunk back her upper body slightly. While Mikoto was deep in thought, Unabara had closed in, and bent down to stare up at Mikoto’s face.

“Don’t be so deep in thought; where were you going to go?”

“Ah… Uh… (Honestly, I’m one that laughs out loud while reading manga even if I’m in the store, so I try not to have people I know around me when I go read manga, but if it’s Shirai Kuroko, that idiot, it wouldn’t really matter.)"

“What?”

“Ah, nothing! Nothing, nothing! I didn’t just accidentally say what I was thinking out loud.”

“So there isn’t anything that urgently needs to be done? Ah, if so, there’s a restaurant around here whose seafood is quite delicious; do I have the pleasure of inviting you to there?”

(At this time, right after breakfast?) Mikoto thought, but she didn’t let it show on

her face.

“Ah… but… but… Thank you for your invitation, but I have some private business to take care of…”

“Then take care of it now. I’ll come with you, too.”

“Uu… ah… I do have some things to do, but…”

“…?” Unabara involuntarily frowned and said, “Is it somewhere that’s inconvenient for me to go?”

“Ah, that’s right, that’s right!” Mikoto clapped and said, “I… I'm (uh…) right, right, going to the lingerie section of the department store now; boys would be uncomfortable there, right?”

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t mind.”

Without the slightest hesitation, Unabara unthinkingly answered with a dazzling smile.

(The excuse got broken so easily?!) the Mikoto in her heart cried out in anguish.

(Uu, uu, what to do, what to do? Ah, right, I’ll just pretend I already have a date with some other guy! In that case, no matter what he says, he can’t really stick to me like this. Even though it’s old-fashioned, fine, I’ll just grab a guy, say something like "Sorry, did you wait long?", and improvise something to fake it through. Even though it’ll give that unlucky guy some trouble, I’ll treat him to a canned drink later, and that'll do!)

Mikoto looked around, trying to find a guy to play along with her act. However, today just had to be August 31st. In Academy City where 80% of the residents were students, today was a day to stay at home and rush to complete the rest of the remaining summer homework.

In other words, there wasn’t anyone in sight.

(Uwah… Is there no hope left?) the Mikoto in her heart once again cried out in anguish. At that instant, almost like a gift from the heavens, three boys walked out from a corner and towards them.

Part 2

August 31, 8:25 AM.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Aogami Pierce.

The two that had met up this morning seemed to be classmates of Kamijou Touma; the key word being "seem", because Kamijou had lost his memories, and had no recollection of going to class.

For the Kamijou now, he shouldn’t have had the time to wander around on the streets. Before today, August 31st, his summer homework had been a complete blank. The him right now could be said to be in a state in which every second was of the utmost importance.

Kamijou, in the depths of homework hell, had reasoned that it would be a long-term battle that would last to tomorrow morning, so he had gone to the corner store buy some canned coffee. But today, the brand he normally bought had just gotten sold out, with not a single can left. Just when Kamijou had been thinking about which bastard had taken all the stickers that could be traded in for free stuff for himself, he got caught by Aogami and Tsuchimikado. The two classmates who had already finished all their homework wanted to play hard on the last day of summer vacation and make some good memories.

“Aaaaaaaaah! Today’s already the last day of summer vacation, Kami-yan! Sigh, and this year, there's been no encounters with any girls that fell from the sky, no finding of a catgirl in a cardboard box on a rainy day, nor even a meeting with a beautiful fiancée behind our doors that we never knew was engaged to us. It’s been an incredibly normal summer vacation, the kind that novels describe with only one line: ‘That high school student had a summer vacation.’”

Aogami Pierce, being a pessimist, said that in a fake Kansai accent.

“Ah, I so want to be in love! Even though we’re in a co-ed school, I still want the new semester to be like one of those enviable love comedies where senpai, kouhai, teacher, students, class rep, childhood friends, and dorm manager are all girls who have no experience with boys!”

Being an optimist, Tsuchimikado Motoharu said that in a peculiar tone.

Facing the two and their completely unrealistic views, Kamijou held his head with his hands, and cried out in anguish.

“Oi, oi, you two, don’t tell me you guys knew that I, Kamijou Touma, am putting my life on the line rushing to do my summer homework, and came to disturb me because of that? Please don’t disturb me today! If you guys are my friends, then help me with my summer homework!”

“Isn’t this good, Kami-yan? If you don’t finish your homework, then you can get Komoe-sensei’s special personal tutoring. Ah, then why did I finish my summer homework? Of course it’s to get praised by Komoe-sensei. No, no, I've followed Kami-yan’s example, and have an ulterior motive, too!”

“Even if we help Kami-yan, it’s not like it’ll get me into a love comedy, right? If the math problems can make a mysterious beauty fall from the sky, I’ll definitely help!”

Facing the two classmates who obviously viewed someone else’s misfortune as a joke, Kamijou involuntarily revealed a dark smile.

“You two, you have no right to call yourselves friends! What's this 'beauty that falls from the sky'? Do the girls you like all belong to an aviators' group or something!?”

Hearing Kamijou so loudly objecting, Tsuchimikado said, as if muttering to himself, “No, no, no, in this day and age, girls who fall from the sky end up on verandas, you know.”

Kamijou didn’t understand his reply though, since he had lost his memories.

Aogami Pierce on the other side even started to state loudly, “Ha, you’re too naïve, Kami-yan. I have a wide range of acceptance when it comes to women: not just heroines that fall from the sky, but also step sisters both younger and

older, step mothers, step daughters, twins, widows, upperclassmen, underclassmen, classmates, female teachers, childhood friends, rich girls, blonde hair, black hair, brown hair, silver hair, long hair, semi-long hair, short hair, bobs, drill hair, straight hair, pigtails, ponytails, braided hair, wavy hair, messy hair, ahoges, sailor uniforms, blazer uniforms, PE uniforms, judo uniforms, archery uniforms, kindergarten teachers, nurses, maids, policewomen, shrine maidens, nuns, military officers, secretaries, lolis, shotas, tsunderes, cheerleaders, stewardesses, waitresses, white gothic, black gothic, china dresses, weak albinos, crazy day dreamers, girls with multiple personalities, dominatrices, princesses, kneesocks, garterbelts, crossdressing beauties, glasses, eyepatches, bandages, school swimsuits, one piece swimsuits, bikini swimsuits, slingshot swimsuits, ridiculous swimsuits, non-human girls, ghosts, animal ears, etc.- any female is within my area of acceptance.”

“At least one of them isn’t a female, right?”

Kamijou said with his last ounce of strength; he couldn’t take much more of this.

Then, Tsuchimikado, with a peculiar smile on his face, asked, “Then again, what kind of girls does Kami-yan like?”

“…Dorm manager oneesans[5]- even temporary ones will do.”

“We’re in a boys' dorm; even the manager’s an old geezer, you know?!”

“Shut up! Even I know that’s impossible in reality! I’m an only child, so of course I’d admire oneesan-type girls! Get off my case, you two!”

“Hm, so you like manager ‘oneesans', huh? Does that mean you have no feelings for imouto[6]-type girls, then? Seriously, basic characters like imouto-types are the best ones.”

Tsuchimikado, who had an actual younger stepsister, nodded enthusiastically. At that point, both Kamijou and Aogami Pierce looked at him with pity.

Kamijou, as the representative for his friends, stated, “I say, as your friend, for the stepsibling relationship between the two of you to last, there’s something you need to know.”

“Wh… What?”

“Your younger stepsister is someone that calls anyone she meets ‘Oniichan’[7].”

“WHAT did you say?!” Tsuchimikado raged, and lifted both hands up high.

“Im… impossible! My younger sister, no matter the time, place, or reason, would never call any man other than me ‘Oniichan’!”

“Really? The day before yesterday, in front of the station at the underground department store, I treated her to a meal at a restaurant there, and she said to me ‘Thank you, Oniichan’.”

“Yesterday, I met her on that street back there, and she said to me ‘Good afternoon, Oniichan’, too.”

Along with the sound of something being snapped, Tsuchimikado's mouth made a sound as if something was being bitten apart.

“I’ll kill you both! How dare you try to get your hands on my younger sister!”

Like that, the fiery fist of an older brother struck at Kamijou and Aogami Pierce.

Part 3

August 31, 8:35 AM.

In the ten whole minutes between her first seeing the three and now, Misaka Mikoto had been frozen solid. In that time, the three of them had continued to play out a crazy brawl worthy of something from the last fifteen minutes of a Hollywood movie. Unabara at times would carefully wave his hands in front of Mikoto’s eyes while saying “Hellooo?”. But Mikoto didn’t notice, her lips were stuck on saying the "S" of "Sorry, did you wait long?", gaping at the chaos between the three of them.

(Wait, wait, wait! Are those the only people that can act as a couple with me? Would Unabara really believe that one of them could be my boyfriend…? Uwaa, they're actually talking about real-life younger stepsister issues!)

Mikoto finally unfroze, and held her head in despair. At her side, Unabara asked "Are you alright?", and Mikoto quickly turned around and squeezed out a smile before starting to look around again. No, apart from those three, there wasn't anyone else in sight. And even those three in their fighting were gradually moving away from where Mikoto was. If she didn't ditch Unabara now, she'd be stuck with him for the whole day.

There was no other choice. Even though they were still fighting a red-hot battle which didn't look like they were just playing or messing around, Mikoto still decided to choose one of those three.

So, who to choose?

(The first one, with blue hair and piercings… No way! This guy spouts jargon that even someone that reads a lot of manga like me can't understand, and seems to use two-dimensional logic on three-dimensional girls!)

Mikoto shook her head wildly.

(Then the second one, with blond hair and sunglasses… Not this guy either! From what they just said, this guy's a dangerous character that has issues with a real-life younger stepsister!)

Mikoto shook her head even more, to the point where she was starting to get dizzy.

(Then the third one… eh? Is this guy… N-no way! Definitely not this guy! Ah, but… if I don't choose him, then I'd have to choose the blue-haired one or the guy in sunglasses… Uu… This… Uwaaaaaaaaaa!)

"Ah, wait up! Where are you going, Misaka-san?"

From behind came Unabara's voice, but there was no time for him now. Distance from the target was about twenty meters. The boy was focused on the final battle and had yet to notice the incoming attack.

Part 4

August 31, 8:40 AM.

“Sorry, did you wait long?”

A girl’s voice from behind made Kamijou and the other two stop their battle right before the climax, with their faces showing impatience from the interruption. Of course none of them had promised to meet up with a girl, so they were all bitterly thinking, (Oh, is there a pretty boy idol around here or something? Either way, it has nothing to do with us, bastard!)

But after thinking about it, today was August 31st, and there was nobody else around here…

“?”

Just as Kamijou tilted his head in uncertainty...

“I asked you if you waited long; did you not hear me!?”

Kamijou’s back, around the level of his waist, was slammed by a girl charging at full speed. After a loud boom, Kamijou and the girl both went rolling along the footpath.

“D-dammit, who the hell did this to me… eh? Why does it have to be you, Misaka?”

“…(What do you mean by why does it have to be me!? Ah… no, anyway, please play along!)”

Mikoto’s whisper made Kamijou’s eyes spread wide open, and he said something like “Ah?”. On the other hand, Aogami Pierce and Tsuchimikado’s reply was…

“What? K-Kami-yan got hugged by a Tokiwadai student! After a miko, a nun, and Komoe-sensei, there’s another new Kamijou legend!?”

“…Kami-yan, just how many hidden female characters do you have in your route?”[8]

The two's comments made Mikoto shake in anger. But she didn’t reply; her actions were completely different from her usual demeanor. As a Level 5 Electromaster, she normally would send off many bolts of electricity when she got mad, regardless of where she was.

“Ah, uh… Misaka-sama, what’s going on?”

“…(Shh! Don’t talk… Oh, dammit! The distance is too far, so he didn’t hear the talking over here. So these three weren't actually that loud? Fine…)”

Mikoto stared off somewhere, and softly clenched her fists. A puzzled Kamijou followed her line of sight. Standing further down the footpath and looking slightly lonely was a cool-type boy. He didn’t know how to react to Mikoto’s sudden and mysterious act, and had frozen.

“Get off already!” said Kamijou; he looked impatient on the outside, but his heart was pounding furiously.

After a deep breath, Mikoto yelled, “Ahaha! Sorry I’m late! Did you wait long? To pay you back, I’ll treat you to something, so please forgive me!”

“…Wha?”

Mikoto was speaking loudly. Kamijou, was speechless. For Tsuchimikado and Aogami Pierce, time stopped. And the cool-type boy embarrassingly shifted his gaze away.

Suddenly, *Bang*, all the windows of the Tokiwadai Girls' Middle School Dorm opened simultaneously.

“Ah…”

Mikoto’s smile froze. The students standing next to the windows were whispering excitedly to each other. The girl with twin ponytails, Shirai Kuroko,

was in a state of shock, her mouth opening and closing but with nothing coming out. After a while, a mature woman's silhouette showed up in one of the windows—apparently the dorm's highest manager.

The mature woman seemed to be saying something, though her voice was too quiet and far away for Kamijou and Mikoto to hear her. But the two could imagine what the frightful statement was:

"Interesting, you dare to rendezvous in front of the dorm with a boy. That's some courage, Misaka."

"Ah… ahaha!" Mikoto's face was scarily contorted. "Ahahahaha! Uhuhuhuhu!"

Mikoto let out a strangled laughter, grabbed Kamijou's hand, and left the scene at a speed that was literally equal to that of flight. Kamijou, who had no idea what was going on, was dragged further and further away.

Part 5

August 31, 9:45 AM.

Just like that, Kamijou and Mikoto had run through the streets for an hour.

"Wait a sec! Isn't this setting a bit strange!? Why did we have to run nonstop for an hour?"

"Shut up! Be quiet! Give me some time to think this through!"

Mikoto cried out as she shook her head vigorously.

Kamijou looked around. They were apparently on a side road, tall buildings all around them, with another smaller building seeming to be another student dorm.

Mikoto took several deep breaths before finally calming down.

“Whoo… Sorry, I kind of lost control back there. Let’s find some place to sit, and I’ll tell you the current situation.”

“Ah? What current situation? Hey, did you just drag me into something troublesome again?”

“Ah, it’s almost 10; the stores are about to open now, right? Though we just had breakfast, how about we go for a hotdog?”

“Wait, wait! Don’t just ignore my question! Did you drag me into something troublesome again? I haven’t finished my summer homework yet! Not to mention you gave me so much trouble; do you think you can buy me off with one hotdog?”

“Hmm?” Mikoto put her index finger to her chin and said, “Then that’ll do.”

“What?”

“We’ll go for the most expensive hotdog in the world; that way, you won’t have any objections, right?”

“Uh, that wasn’t the point… Ahh, you’re not even listening to me!”

Kamijou didn’t even have time to complain before being dragged off by Mikoto.

Part 6

August 31, 10:15 AM.

One for ¥2000.

After seeing the price, Kamijou was speechless. Standing in a converted caravan, the vendor smiled half-heartedly after seeing the look on Kamijou’s face; he probably saw that look on his customers’ faces a lot.

“Two thousand yen… Just what do they put in it that makes it this expensive?”

“If they told you, could they keep the business going? Ah, two hotdogs, please,” said Mikoto.

While ordering the food, Kamijou looked at the movements of the vendor. The bread and the ingredients didn’t differ much from normal ones, and he couldn’t see anything especially strange added in. To be brutally honest, if the hotdogs here were to be compared to another vendor’s, there probably wouldn’t be any difference. The slightly small hotdog couldn’t even be called a proper meal—at most, it was a small snack.

(Something like this can actually cost two thousand yen?) Kamijou thought while feeling fatigued, not knowing what to say.

Mikoto took the two hotdogs, and paid for the both of them.

“Ah, hey… The money…”

“Don’t be so shocked, alright? Even hotdogs have difference in quality. Some vendors in Los Angeles actually have movie stars go to them in limos. Why are you scared half to death by the difference in price?”

“That’s not what I mean. I’ll pay for my own share.”

“Ah? Don’t mind the small change; besides, taking out your wallet can be troublesome, right?”

Mikoto said that lightly, so the short-in-cash student Kamijou could only laugh hollowly. Apparently, Misaka Mikoto, who attended Tokiwadai Middle School, was an authentic ojou-sama after all.

The hotdog seller, when choosing where to set up shop, probably had considered "places to eat" as there were benches nearby. The trees near the footpath stood against the sunlight like shields and the shade looked cool enough… but in reality, it was still hot; the heat wave of the Kanto district should not be looked down upon. Faint sounds of construction could be heard from afar.

“Here, take it.”

Kamijou took the hotdog out of Mikoto's hand, carefully observed it, and then took a bite. Though he was somewhat unhappy about the situation, it was still fairly delicious. What made him even more unhappy, however, was that he couldn’t really taste the difference between this one and one from any other store.

Mikoto bit into the hotdog, carefully making sure that the mustard didn’t get on her nose, and started explaining the events to Kamijou. Unabara Mitsuki, that cool-type guy, had been sticking to her, and she had difficulty getting rid of him. She had been subjected to his invitations every single day for the past week, and to get rid of him, she needed someone to pretend to be her boyfriend—and the only choice available was Kamijou.

Kamijou looked around, and of course didn’t see Unabara anywhere. After all, he couldn’t be hiding behind trees twenty-four hours a day, spying…

“Though, now that we've lost that Unabara, there should be no need to act now, right? Even if we act in a place where he can’t see us, it’d be meaningless.”

With Kamijou’s summer homework piled sky-high, he really didn’t have time to get into other people’s problems today.

“Hmm… though we’ve only lost him temporarily for now, I’d definitely be stuck with him next time, so I better use this chance to make sure he’ll never come bothering me again.”

“…Oi.”

“So if I be with you for the whole day today, let as many people see us as possible—even better if Unabara sees us a few times—just so the impression would be more reinforced. If we can make Unabara stay away from me, then it’ll be all good… What, why are you holding your head like that?”

“Nothing.” Kamijou held his head, and sighed.

In other words, Mikoto was asking Kamijou to pretend to be her boyfriend for the day. Kamijou was very worried though, since if the plan succeeded, he would become "a total bastard that goes after middle school students." Though, since Kamijou was living together with Index at this point, he really didn’t have to put up a self-righteous façade like that—but at least he didn’t know how old Index

was. Even a female teacher could look only twelve; a woman’s age was unfathomable.

And most importantly, he still had his summer homework to do. Due to those various reasons, Kamijou really wanted to refuse to help Mikoto, but he noticed that Mikoto’s eyes were starting to show some impatience, and that somewhat alarmed Kamijou. If she really got annoyed over that, he wouldn't only not have time to do his homework, but would also be forced into a 24-hour Ironman endurance battle (though for some reason, Kamijou was only worried about the fight dragging on and not the possibility that he would lose).

Seeing Kamijou keeping silent, Mikoto felt discontented, and said, “Oi, if you have any questions or thoughts, then say them already.”

“Thoughts, huh…? Do you want to rub the mustard off your nose first?”

“What?!” Mikoto blushed bright-red. She wrapped up the hotdog with a paper towel, put it on the bench, turned away from Kamijou, and took out her handkerchief, hastily trying to rub the mustard off the tip of her nose.

“Uu~~?!”

Then Mikoto held her nose, and kicked her legs furiously. Apparently, she had rubbed too quickly and accidentally got mustard inside.

“Ah… are you alright?”

Kamijou imitated Mikoto, wrapping up his hotdog in the same way and putting it down on the bench, before using his now-free hands to search his pockets, looking for tissues or handkerchiefs.

At that point, Mikoto strained a smile, and said, “I’m… I’m alright. Actually, nothing happened.”

It looked like she wanted to hide at all costs the fact that she made a mess of herself with the mustard. Mikoto turned back to Kamijou, trying to fake as if nothing were out of the ordinary, but the mustard was still apparently affecting her nose. She was not only blushing, but her lips were also tightly pressed, as if she were suppressing the urge to let tears flow. Even her eyebrows were quivering.

“Get… get on with it already, any questions or thoughts?”

“Eh, are you really alright? Then again, this is so like you, crying over something this small. You actually cry a lot, don’t you…?”

“Shut up! I said nothing happened, so nothing happened! Oi, don’t put up a resigned face and approach me with that tissue!”

Mikoto shot vicious look at Kamijou, so he hurriedly retrieved his hands.

(Fine, if she wants me to forget this, I’ll just pretend this never happened.)

“Eh?”

Kamijou involuntarily let out a slight sound.

In the small space between Kamijou and Mikoto were two tidily wrapped hotdogs. Needless to say, they were their hotdogs, but which one belonging to

who couldn’t be distinguished.

Mikoto also noticed.

“Eh… Do you remember which one was yours?”

“I forgot; it’s probably the one on the right.”

Kamijou went for one without much thought. However, Mikoto grabbed Kamijou’s wrist with surprising speed.

Kamijou stopped and looked over at Mikoto.

“Wait… wait a minute, let me check.”

“What?”

Mikoto grabbed the one in Kamijou’s hand and compared the two of them. She peeled the paper towel away and looked carefully at the bitten parts.

To Kamijou's eyes, there wasn’t much difference between the two. Both hotdogs were half-eaten, so there was no difference in size. The ingredients for both were the same too.

Then again, it was the exact same hotdog; Kamijou didn’t understand why it should matter which one was which.

“Did you figure it out?”

“…”

“Did you figure it out?”

“…”

“Did you—”

“Ahh, I don’t know! Fine, as you said, you take the right and I’ll take the left! Seriously, you should at least care about this a little, idiot!”

Kamijou took the hotdog from a babbling Mikoto, tilting his head in puzzlement.

“Sigh, I don’t know what you are so uptight about; didn’t we order the same thing?”

He then bit into the hotdog as if nothing was wrong. Of course, there wasn’t any change in the taste either.

Mikoto, who until a moment ago was still making a fuss, suddenly became quiet. For some reason, even her movements froze up.

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Mikoto answered.

Then after staring at her hotdog for a while, she finally nibbled into it like a small animal. Her face seemed to blush slightly.

“…Back to the original topic, I need your help to ‘act’ with me to fool Unabara. Do you have any questions or thoughts?”

“I say, just what is wrong with you? You suddenly became so timid, does that means getting mustard on the nose actually has this kind of power?”

“Shut up! It wasn’t because of that reason… Wait, just what am I saying!? Anyway, say any question or thoughts you have already!”

Mikoto, with a red face, leaned over and shouted, their faces almost touching. Kamijou hurriedly leaned backwards.

“Uwaa! Uh… Uh… my thoughts are ‘are you kidding me!?’, and my question is 'just what do we have to do to act like a couple?'”

“Eh? What do you mean doing what…?”

“What I mean is, what do we have to do so that we appear as a couple to everyone?”

“…”

“…”

Neither Mikoto and Kamijou had any idea what to do next.

It wasn't just by doing an activity that two people became a couple. A true couple, no matter what they were doing, would always appear as a true couple; the inexperienced duo here had no idea how to portray that.

Part 7

August 31, 10:45 AM.

In the end, Kamijou and Mikoto decided to sit there and chat.

However, most students were focused on finishing their summer homework, so the place was empty of people. The only one that could see the two of them talking was probably the hotdog vendor. The "let as many people see us as possible" part of the plan was failing miserably from what Kamijou could see.

“So yeah, after the experiment, there’s less than ten Sisters left in Academy City; the rest of them got sent off to 'outside' facilities to adjust their bodies.”

“What? Sent to outside facilities, is that alright? If the people outside examine the Sisters, wouldn’t the contents of the psychic powers development program be leaked out?”

“Some of the other companies and research facilities outside are also on the side of Academy City. Academy City can’t survive by itself; things such as allocating resources, obtaining various information, dealing with legal issues… there are plenty of links that aren't seen on the surface.”

“Oh, so I guess that means they should be doing alright. That’s good, that’s good.”

At this point, Mikoto went silent for a moment, as if displeased with something, with a somewhat unhappy look on her face. Kamijou didn’t know the reason for that, but he followed suit and also fell silent.

“Wait, this doesn’t seem like what couples talk about, right?”

“Hmm, you’re right. Research facilities, Academy City’s influences, body adjustments, the things we’re talking about are pretty weird.”

“…(I meant we shouldn’t be talking about other girls.)”

“What?”

Kamijou didn’t quite hear her, but Mikoto only replied with a “Nothing”.

Mikoto snuck a glance at Kamijou, only to see Kamijou take out a pile of folded paper from his pockets with a bored look on his face. On closer inspection, it seemed to be a paper on old Japanese. Kamijou then took out an automatic pencil and started doing the questions.

“…Oi, do you understand the situation right now? How do we look like a couple right now? Just studying and leaving the girl at the side, do you think this is male-dominant medieval Europe or something?”

“Sigh, alright, alright, the Irewa Mikoto’s so moe~”[9]

“So by Irewa, you mean you never took me as a human?!”

“Uwaa! Alright, treat this as a study session between couples, then! Honestly speaking, I haven’t even finished one section of my summer homework, this next 24-hour period is like a homework hell for me!”

“What’s summer homework?”

“…Eh, Misaka Mikoto ojou-sama, you don’t know what summer homework is?”

“Ah… come to think of it, I think I’ve heard of it before; it’s something for students so that they won’t slack off during the holidays and end up doing worse in their studies, right? Though even without these things, people shouldn’t slack off or get worse in their studies, right?”

Kamijou was speechless. Tokiwadai Middle School actually didn’t have a thing like summer homework?

“Uu, that’s not fair, why does Tokiwadai have such freedom?”

“How should I know?” Mikoto shrugged off all responsibility with that one sentence.

“What kind of stuff do you get for summer homework?”

“Eh? You can have a look if you want, but these are questions for a high school student; a middle school student like you won’t understand it.”

“Just let me see already!”

Kamijou offhandedly looked to the side at Mikoto before hurriedly leaning back from her. Mikoto, who had leaned over to try and see his homework, was almost touching him cheek-to-cheek.

“Oh, is this for old Japanese? Though it looks like it's only simple revision.”

Mikoto didn’t seem to realize this. She then took the pencil from Kamijou and started writing down the answers, almost completely leaning on Kamijou while doing so. Kamijou could smell a slight faint scent of shampoo from her.

(Uwaa… Not… Not good! I don’t know why, but this isn’t good!)

No matter which part of his body he moved, he’d end up in contact with Mikoto’s body. Kamijou stiffened up to the point where he couldn’t move. After a while, he finally noticed something.

“…Eh? How come you know how to do this?”

“How come you don’t?”

Mikoto answered as if it was only natural, without any negative overtones in her comment. Kamijou had a sudden urge to run away from her.

Mikoto put her hands on Kamijou’s shoulders, smiled gently and said, “Don’t worry, everyone has something they're not good at. Ah, right, I’ll finish these questions for you in return for dragging you into this.”

“As a high school student, I’m getting tutored by a middle school student…”

“Ah… ahaha, uwa, you’re looking really sad about it. Do you want a drink to change the pace? I’ll go get some, and after that, we can keep going with the homework.”

“Ah? If we’re going to buy some drinks, shouldn’t I be the one that goes? Let me go walk around a bit to change the pace—not to mention I still owe you two thousand yen.”

“If I said I’ll go, then I’ll go; if these small matters get refused, it gets kind of awkward, right?”

Mikoto smiled half-heartedly while getting up from the bench, and ran off, leaving Kamijou alone. It didn’t look like there were vending machines nearby, so maybe she was going to the nearest general store or something.

(We’re basically just eating and drinking constantly, huh…?)

Kamijou looked in the direction Mikoto had ran off to before lowering his head and staring at the old Japanese homework again. To be honest, in Kamijou’s eyes, the Japanese on the paper looked no different from English.

“…Sigh…”

Kamijou shook his head tiredly, and moved his gaze away from the paper.

All of a sudden, a small dog ran past Kamijou, and on its collar was a leash. Apparently, it had just ran away from its owner.

Kamijou was slightly surprised, looking at the escaping dog. At this point, a cool-type boy ran across Kamijou’s view and went chasing after the dog. Kamijou still remembered that face; that person was Unabara Mitsuki. Not long after, he caught up with the dog, and held onto the leash.

A few moments later, a boy who looked to be still in primary school caught up to Unabara. Apparently, this boy was the dog's owner. Unabara handed the leash over to the boy, and also said a few things to him. This sight was almost like the cliché where one returned a balloon that was stuck in a tree to a child.

(That was so cool, so elegant. So these people actually exist. In terms of rarity, it should be as rare as a girl that runs away from home and ends up sitting on the

swings at a park while crying.)

Kamijou thought, half-amazed and half-impressed. Truth be told, he was also one of those extremely rare people, the kind who saved girls being harassed from delinquents.

Kamijou and Unabara's eyes met.

Unabara apparently remembered Kamijou's face, too. After showing a slight amount of surprise, he smiled something that appeared similar to a grimace.

"Hello, may I ask what your name is?"

"Ah? I'm Kamijou Touma. You're Unabara Mitsuki right?"

"Eh? I am Unabara Mitsuki, indeed, but how did you know my name?"

Unabara showed an astonished look. He didn't know that Kamijou had already heard about him from Mikoto. Truth be told, Kamijou, who was busy with his homework, had been dragged into this mess because of him.

"Does Unabara Mitsuki have any business with me, Kamijou Touma?"

"Ah, no, there isn't really anything urgent." Unabara seemed a bit unbalanced, and said, "Uh, if you don't mind, can you tell me what your relationship with Misaka-san is?"

"Does it bother you?"

"…Yes; when a guy appears next to a girl I like, it obviously bothers me."

"Ooh…" Kamijou had a better opinion of Unabara after that.

That man was indeed really likable. Surprisingly, he was someone who spoke his mind. Kamijou respected that kind of person.

(Hmm…)

Kamijou thought a bit more, as he only just got asked by Mikoto to act out a scenario to make Unabara completely give up.

“What kind of answer do you want to hear: the answer that’s expected or the answer that’s unexpected?”

“No answer you give would change what I have decided,” Unabara said without any hesitation.

From this, Unabara’s resolve could be seen. He planned to increase his own worth in Misaka’s eyes to gain the advantage rather than defeat his opponent. Maybe this perspective held some amount of stubbornness and recklessness, but Unabara amazingly did not give off the negative feelings normally associated with that kind of act; maybe this was because he didn’t act hostilely to Kamijou or hold resentment towards Mikoto.

Part 8

August 31, 11:02 AM.

After chatting with each other for a bit, Kamijou discovered that Unabara Mitsuki’s personality wasn’t that bad.

Kamijou had originally thought he was just another rich guy since he was the grandson of the director of Tokiwadai Middle School, so he must be one of those unlikable upper-class people- though Kamijou turned out to be mistaken on that.

“So I feel Misaka-san should be clearer when saying whether she likes or dislikes someone. Ah, the answer to that question is (3).”

“It’s (3)… (3)… Is it? But I feel she’s fairly direct when it comes to her feelings. Once, I forgot her name before, and I got attacked by her thunderbolts because of that.”

“I think for her being ‘direct’ here, it probably involved a certain amount of shyness and acting. To be honest, I don’t think I ever heard what she truly thinks,

not even once. Ah, the answer to that question should be (4); (2) is probably a trap.”

“Thanks. Hmm, after you said that, it seems to be the case.”

“Yeah, it’s like that. She doesn’t say what she thinks clearly, so someone like me is forced to go chasing after her continuously. I’m being direct, so why can’t she be direct as well and give me a clear-cut answer? Ah, that question’s (1).”

“Ah, it’s not (4)? Though you sure are brave. What you're doing right now is like getting a pistol while not knowing how many bullets are in it and playing Russian roulette with it. Even though there are only two outcomes, it’s not like the chances are exactly 50% each way.”

“I understand. I’m afraid that if I hear refusal from her mouth, I myself wouldn’t know how sad I would be. But…”

“But?”

“...I still can’t. I can’t do something that I know would make her cry, and still forcibly take possession of her. If I can’t let her obtain happiness, then there would be no point.”

Kamijou suddenly wanted to root for him in his endeavor, but unfortunately, he already knew the outcome.

(Ahh, youth.)

Kamijou sighed. To be blunt, Kamijou couldn't help at all when it comes to a thing like this. And after hearing the words from the bottom of Unabara’s heart, Kamijou didn’t know whether he should still put on the act to try and fool him.

Suddenly, from the side came the sounds of footsteps.

Kamijou turned and looked. Mikoto, who was holding two plastic bottled drinks, was standing right in front of him, staring with a shocked expression.

“Hmm? What’s wrong with you…?”

Before Kamijou finished asking, Mikoto strode out towards him, gesturing for

him to stand up with her chin, as if to drag him away from Unabara.

“Come with me for a moment!”

“Ah… Oi!”

Kamijou looked over at Unabara. Unabara seemed to be hurt from Mikoto’s actions, but he still maintained his smile. His expression became forced, though.

Mikoto looked at Unabara and said, “Sorry, I have some business with this guy today.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Yeah, sorry. Goodbye.”

Mikoto said that with a smile. To Kamijou who understood her to some extent, Mikoto’s actions were unnatural to say the least. Unabara also seemed to notice, and didn’t try to argue with her. Then, Mikoto turned and walked away.

Kamijou was troubled as to which side he should stay with, not knowing who to choose. Unabara smiled and said, “Please stay with her.”

Part 9

August 31, 11:20 AM.

After wordlessly walking for a while and ending up at a deserted side street, Mikoto finally stopped. Kamijou almost walked into her at her sudden stop.

She turned forcibly and, with an expression filled with amazement and anger, said, “What the hell is wrong with you? Don’t you know the reason why you have to act along? If you and Unabara became friends, wouldn’t it all have been meaningless?”

“…”

“Listen, right now, you’re now my… my… ‘lover’! All this is for Unabara Mitsuki to no longer come harassing me! Could you please not forget this basic goal?”

“…”

“What, why aren’t you saying anything?”

“I can’t,” Kamijou honestly said. “Because that guy’s serious. He already knows that doing so would only get him hurt in the end, yet he still honestly came out and stated his feelings for you. And he already decided that even if he’s hurt because of it, he won’t end up resenting you. I can’t trick someone like him, nor do I want to.”

“What…?”

Mikoto seemed surprised, looking stunned at Kamijou.

Kamijou didn’t realize Mikoto was slightly trembling.

“On the other hand, I want to ask you: what don’t you like about Unabara Mitsuki? Does he have some sort of serious flaw? Of course, if you don’t like him, it’s not right to force you to go out with him, either, though I do want to know the reason behind this.”

“…”

Mikoto stared at Kamijou, as if she wanted to say something. But her lips were tightly pressed; not a word was able to be emitted from them—even her breathing seemed to stop.

Kamijou and Mikoto prolonged the silence.

After some time, Mikoto finally said, “You…”

“?”

“…Mm, nothing.”

Mid-sentence, Mikoto seemed to change her mind and didn’t continue. She put up a smile that said there was nothing wrong, but her eyes showed a bit of loneliness—at least that was the feeling Kamijou got.

Part 10

August 31, 11:45 AM.

In the side street, there were only Mikoto and the boy.

From the words that had come out of the boy’s mouth, even from what was seen on the surface, what the impact of those words do to Mikoto was clear. She didn’t know what "that feeling" that pulsed through her heart was. But, she subconsciously felt that "that feeling" shouldn’t be shown—no, it could even be said that there was a force inside her that absolutely could not let "that feeling" out.

On the other hand, this also meant "that feeling" was so powerful that if she was not careful, it would erupt from inside her. Mikoto was trying with all her might to suppress "that feeling", which was running around inside her like steam in a kettle.

It was unbelievable.

Even though she knew "that feeling" shouldn’t be shown, suppressing it was making Mikoto feel painful beyond her belief. Did that mean that deep down, Mikoto wanted to let out "that feeling"? No, that was not it either. Just thinking about the aftermath of letting "that feeling" out made her blush bright red.

In such complicated confusion, Mikoto didn’t even know what "that feeling" was.

Mikoto herself didn’t know what was going on, and could only suppress all

thoughts before they left her mouth.

Mikoto now dimly realized something.

Mikoto had always thought she was someone special. She believed that her distance with this boy was closer than that of anyone else around him. If the boy had had a list with the names of a thousand people and, while he was browsing through it, came across the name "Misaka", he should have been slightly interested in that instant and looked at that name a bit longer.

However, in reality, that was not the case.

It was such a small realization, but it gave Mikoto's heart a large shock. Why something this small hurt her so much, Mikoto didn't know—nor did she have a way to solve it. If possible, she really wanted to run away. Mikoto wanted to run away from this inexplicable pain so much.

But Mikoto couldn't do that.

She didn't know why, but she couldn't turn her back on him; she couldn't leave the boy and not come back.

That would be very painful.

Compared to the pain now, it would be a lot more painful.

(…Ahh, I'm such an idiot.)

Mikoto sighed in her heart.

The boy seemed to not notice the internal struggle of Mikoto, only asking with a puzzled voice, "What are you smiling about?"

Part 11

August 31, 12:00 PM.

Kamijou and Mikoto walked to the main road, discussing what to do next about Unabara.

“Alright, what do you plan to do now? Do you want to continue the act? Or do you want to give it up?”

“…Sigh, what do you think we should do?”

“I’m planning to withdraw from the act. There’s really no point in continuing. And anyway, Unabara’s not the kind of person you think he is, right? Even if he’s rejected, he wouldn’t be angry at you.”

“Maybe so, but recently he changed; it’s like he’s a different person… Anyway, why are you helping him? What happened?”

“Nothing much, just asked him for some help on my homework.”

Mikoto frowned, so Kamijou passed the old Japanese homework over for her to have a look. After Unabara’s help, most of them were correctly answered.

But after Mikoto took a look, her expression became serious.

“Indeed… the answers are correct.”

“Hmm? What are you trying to say?”

“Was he this smart? From what I remember, he shouldn’t be this good.”

“What? But he got the correct answer, didn’t he?”

“Mm… His grades at school are indeed top of the class… but his ability is Level 4 Telekinesis, a kind of unseen power that can control objects from a distance.”

“Does that have anything to do with his grades?”

“Of course it does.” Mikoto crossed her arms and said, “According to that nosy Shirai Kuroko’s behind-the-scenes investigations, he actually got his grades through cheating. His method is to put a thin layer of his ability on the computer screen for the exam, feel the minute heat and radiation, and reverse-engineer the

correct answer… Simply put, it’s like a stethoscope. So, his grades and his knowledge have no connection.”

“Uwaa…” Kamijou was speechless. He had heard of a special kind of machine that could measure the slight magnetic field released to decode the electronic flow of information. But for a human to be able to achieve the same thing really surprised Kamijou.

“How come you can just stand there and say it like it’s nothing special?”

“It’s not that rare, is it? As an Electromaster myself, I can do similar things—for example, stealing information from a credit card's magnetic strip."

Looking at Mikoto saying it as if it was nothing special, the Level 0 Kamijou Touma could only choose to keep silent.

Part 12

August 31, 12:12 PM.

Lunchtime.

Maybe it was because he already had a hotdog that Kamijou didn’t feel that hungry. But he just remembered that Index was left alone in the student dorms. The kitchen had some food, like bread, that didn’t need to be cooked before being eaten, so she shouldn’t starve. But knowing Index, she would probably not do anything and just wait for Kamijou to get back.

“Alright, so the act stops here. To repay you, I’ll treat you to something. What do you want to eat?”

“You still want to eat? No, thanks, I’m not that hungry.”

“It’s to repay you, so just accept it already. Ah, the extra-large sized ‘hell’s fried

rice’ that’s free if you can finish it in an hour! Do you want to try?”

“You’re just messing with me now, aren’t you?”

As it was now time for food, many students came out looking for a place to eat, and the place started to get bustling.

Kamijou followed Mikoto in the crowd, being careful not to lose her, and said, “Wait, if we end the act now, how are you going to deal with Unabara?”

“I’ll handle that myself. I might get in some trouble with the director, but… Forget it, that's my problem.”

Mikoto’s tone seemed to show that she was resigned to whatever would come after that. Kamijou decided not to press the issue any further.

The two of them went to various places looking for a place to eat lunch, but all the restaurants were full. In the end, the two decided to buy some cheap hamburgers and just eat them outside. But even with this compromise, all the fast food retailers had long queues; it looked like they would be lining up for a while.

“I’ll go stand in the queue, you just go stay somewhere for a while. I’ll decide what to eat; there’s no problem, right?”

“Ah? We can just line up together, right?”

“Don’t worry. I’m the one that dragged you into this, so I should be doing some of the more boring stuff.”

After that, Mikoto went off and joined the queue. Maybe it was because this shop was exceptionally popular that many more came soon afterward, and Mikoto disappeared into the crowd.

If he tried to force his way into the crowd to join Mikoto, it would probably be rude to the others around them, so Kamijou gave up on trying to go in and stayed outside by himself.

(Uu, in the direct sunlight of summer, it’s probably worse out here than inside. Ahh, come to think of it, what am I going to do about my summer homework?)

Kamijou looked up and stared at the sun with an expression like a slowly drying potted plant. At this time, a familiar face showed up next to him.

Unabara Mitsuki.

“Eh? What are you doing here? And by yourself? Did you finish what you two were doing already?”

“Hmm? Ah, Misaka’s in there.” Kamijou pointed inside. “Do you want to go and talk to her? She should be calm enough now to be able to talk to you.”

“No, don’t bother; just then, she still seemed unhappy.”

Unabara said that with a troubled look on his face.

Part 13

August 31, 12:15 PM.

At the takeaway, it was as crowded as a train carriage during rush hour.

Mikoto in the crowd looked tiredly at the ceiling.

(Summer, the crowd, the heat… Uu… The air conditioner is on, so why is it still so hot!?)

Looking at the unmoving line, Mikoto considered whether to change to another shop. But looking back, there was also a wall of people behind her. If she tried to go out now, she would also cause trouble for people.

Mikoto dryly laughed a few times. At that moment, someone pushed forcibly into the crowd from the back, amid the annoyance and displeasure of the people who moved aside like the tides parting.

Then, the crowd in front of her parted aside.

From the crowd, someone she was very familiar with fell onto the ground.

“Eh? Hey, why are you-?”

“Run!”

He cut off Mikoto’s sentence.

Covered in sweat, his right hand, for some reason, was covered with bandages.

The boy with bloodshot eyes yelled crazily.

Part 14

August 31, 12:15 PM- the exact same time.

“Ah, thanks for helping me with my homework,” said Kamijou, who was standing on the hot summer sidewalk waiting for Mikoto.

In comparison, Unabara, in the same position, still managed to give off a cool atmosphere, smiled, and said, “It’s nothing; I only did what I could with all my power.”

(…With all my power?)

Kamijou felt that something wasn’t quite right.

Unabara also felt a slight pause in the conversation and asked, “What’s wrong?”

“Mm… I want to ask you something.”

“Go ahead.”

“Are your grades good?”

Unabara paused slightly before saying, “Ah, sorry, did I get something wrong on the homework?”

“T-That’s not it…”

How could he ask ‘Didn’t you get your grades by cheating?’ in front of him? Kamijou hurriedly looked for some way to change the topic… Suddenly, his mouth stopped moving.

“What’s wrong?” Unabara asked, slightly confused, but Kamijou didn’t answer. Actually, nothing was wrong with Unabara; what Kamijou was looking at was behind Unabara.

Behind Unabara Mitsuki. The fast food shop Mikoto was lined up in, due to it being lunchtime, was packed with people; plus, the students walking by made it seem even more crowded.

In this view full of people… Kamijou saw another Unabara Mitsuki.

The man whose face, height, clothes, and everything else looked exactly like that of "Unabara" was soaked with sweat and has bloodshot eyes as he rushed into the fast food shop.

Seconds later, Unabara seemed to notice where Kamijou was looking and turned around to look at the fast food shop. But that man had already pushed himself into the crowd.

Kamijou was very suspicious. Was it only someone who looked a lot like Unabara…? If it’s like that, then it’s too similar. Even though they felt slightly different, they looked exactly the same on the outside… yes, just like Mikoto and Misaka Imouto.

“Hey, do you have any siblings?”

“No, I’m an only child. Why do you ask?”

“Uh… I just saw someone who looked a lot like you entering that shop.”

Kamijou pointed at the shop, and Unabara turned back and looked once more.

“Mm… I didn’t see, so I don’t quite understand what’s going on. You only got a glance at him, right? Could it be that it’s only the hair and clothes that looked the same? Anyway, I don’t have siblings.”

After that was said, it seemed to be right. Kamijou hadn’t looked that close, so he was really not sure on the details. Now Unabara seemed a bit anxious, taking a look at Kamijou before looking back at the direction of the fast food shop.

“Excuse me, but did that person really look like me that much?”

“Eh? Ah, mm. Not just like you, but almost… exactly the same, though it’s probably just someone that looks a lot like you; don’t be so worried.”

“That person who looked a lot like me went into the shop, and Misaka-san’s in the shop, too, right? I’m a bit worried.”

Unabara had a troubled expression on his face as he looked at the entrance to the fast food shop.

“Among the espers in this city, some supposedly have the Metamorphose ability. Just like its name, it can make somebody’s face or body similar to someone else’s, though it’s apparently impossible to change it at the genetic level.”

Looking at the slightly nervous Unabara, Kamijou thought that maybe he was just worrying too much, though maybe it was natural for him to be that way, since he liked Misaka.

“Hmm, it doesn’t matter if it’s someone that looks similar; we can just go in and check, right? Even though I think it may just be nothing, it’s good to clear things up as fast as possible.”

Kamijou walked towards the fast food shop, but Unabara instead took a step back.

“Ah, no… I just made Misaka-san mad; if I really am just worrying too much and see Misaka-san like this, I’ll be troubled.”

“Why do you have a lonely smile when you say things like that? You just care

about her, right?”

“Caring about her and being nosy are two different things. Sorry, if possible, can you go in and have a look if there’s anything wrong?”

“Alright, I get it, though even if this isn’t something I should intrude in, I feel that you don’t have to be so timid at this point. Just in this past week, she has already refused several of your invitations, but you didn’t give up, right?”

“Uh, I don’t get what you are saying.”

“Ah, I meant…”

“All this week, I was at a club practice. I know she was avoiding me, so I thought that maybe I should let both sides cool off a bit first. Today’s the last day of summer vacation, and I wanted to see Misaka-san after I haven’t seen her for a while, so I came to look for her.”

Kamijou was surprised. According to Mikoto, "Unabara Mitsuki" had been harassing her all this week—but "Unabara Mitsuki" himself said he had been at club activities. If that was the case, then who was it that had been going to Mikoto all this time?

Unabara didn’t seem to know this. Kamijou didn’t want to cause more unease for him, so he just ran past him and headed for the fast food shop.

But after running halfway there, Kamijou thought of something. If Unabara cheated to get his grades, then how had he gotten the answers to his homework so easily?

As Kamijou questioned this, from behind suddenly came Unabara’s voice.

"It looks like nothing ever goes as planned... When you lie to deceive someone."

With a *Don!*, the center of Kamijou’s back was hit by a strong impact. A few seconds later, Kamijou realized it was from a fist. Just like when a plastic bag full of air is suddenly stepped on, the air inside his lungs was pushed out of his body, not to mention yelling in pain—he couldn’t even breathe.

Kamijou turned his head around, looked behind him, and saw Unabara Mitsuki

with a cold stare looking back.

Kamijou didn’t understand what was going on; due to the lack of air, his head blanked out for a moment. Unabara put his hand behind him and took out something similar to a knife.

As Unabara stabbed forward with his knife, Kamijou also stepped forward hurriedly.

Kamijou felt the knife almost slash across his back, and started sweating. But he still forced himself to breathe and opened some distance between himself and Unabara to prevent a fatal blow. In such a large crowd, everything below the chest was blocked from sight by other people, so rather than covering Kamijou’s mouth and stabbing him, this was less obvious. If Unabara killed Kamijou this way, he could still blend into the crowd without anyone noticing his acts.

This wasn’t a suicidal attack that took the opponent down with him, but an assassination technique that put one’s own safety first.

An act of violence carried out in broad daylight amongst a crowd of people.

But there were no screams or disturbances; from this, one could see how skilled Unabara was.

(Could it be…?)

Kamijou felt himself losing his balance. He tried to stabilize himself, but his stumbling feet couldn’t stop. As if using "Unabara" as the center of a circle, Kamijou moved continuously.

(Could it be… that this one is the fake…?)

"Unabara Mitsuki" smiled slightly, as if seeing through Kamijou’s thought from his eyes.

Kamijou looked at "Unabara Mitsuki’s" hand, and saw him holding a knife made of black stone. It didn’t look like it was made by cutting, but instead by chipping the rock itself.

Because it didn’t look like a weapon, people around it didn’t panic when they

saw the stone knife.

Kamijou kept trying to focus, blinded by the pain in his head, and asked, “… Dammit… Why… are you doing this…?”

“You’re asking me why? Because now is the crucial period of infiltrating… even if I explain it, you wouldn’t understand the importance of it, right? Then again, the real deal actually escaped. Guess this half-assed way of just imprisoning him was a mistake; I should’ve just killed him in the first place. Ah, just so you know, I’m not his brother or someone that looks similar to him. Apart from science’s Metamorphose ability, there are other ways of changing one’s image into someone else’s.”

"Unabara Mitsuki" said that before pointing his stone knife at the sky.

Boom!

Something invisible flew past Kamijou’s cheek.

Something like an invisible laser had been shot from the knife's edge, hitting an illegally parked car behind Kamijou. Almost like it had been branded, a complicated seal appeared on the door of the car. From the seal, something invisible was spreading out. Just like an evil look at somebody else, it couldn’t be seen, but it could be felt. It seemed that this phenomenon couldn’t be explained by science—almost as if it symbolized the existence of a power outside science.

That was magic.

After a second’s pause, a huge clatter was heard. The car’s doors, glass, frame, wheels… every part was disassembled.

Not "destroyed" by a rough cutting or pulling, but "disassembled" like a toy model being returned to the state it was in before being built.

Kamijou’s face went white after seeing that.

If that incomprehensible attack hit the human body, what would happen… could easily be imagined.

A disturbance spread among the crowd like a wave, but nobody screamed, nor did they panic. From their eyes, it was only an "unordinary phenomenon", and nobody thought of it as an "attack".

"Unabara Mitsuki" didn’t even look at his surroundings.

Once again, he raised his knife.

“?!”

Kamijou started to sweat profusely on his back.

Unabara’s attack was fearsome. Though Kamijou’s right hand had the ability to destroy any supernatural power, but to be able to predict this kind of attack where it couldn’t be seen by the eyes was just as hard as trying to see and dodge bullets.

Mikoto’s electricity attacks may have been similar in attack style, but after all, the electricity attack could be blocked by extending out his right hand and using it as a lightning rod to attract the attack and then negate it.

But that wouldn’t work against Unabara’s mysterious attacks.

And the most frightening thing was that the accuracy of the attack was very low. Kamijou was only five meters away from Unabara, without any defenses, and the attack still hadn’t hit him. It had low accuracy, but its power was enough to destroy a car in one blow.

There were plenty of passersby who were surprised by the car being disassembled, but nobody thought that it was an attack on someone. Unabara didn’t care about dragging somebody else into this mess. If that magician was allowed to rampage in this situation, a lot of people would be hit by stray shots.

“Dammit!”

Kamijou risked the danger of turning his back to Unabara in order to find a deserted place. He dashed into a side street, running frantically down the twisting and turning path.

The sounds of the invisible-weapon-wielding "enemy's" footsteps could be heard

closing in step by step.

Part 15

August 31, 12:24 PM.

(Dammit! What the hell is going on? Why would a magician appear here?! What is he after?!)

Kamijou cursed in his head while running through the side streets.

First, he needed information on the enemy's attack traits.

Kamijou took out his cell phone while running. Fortunately for him, the enemy's attack didn't have rapid-fire or much accuracy. But even so, being in a situation where the enemy's attack was continuously fired from behind still made Kamijou feel pressured. The fingers holding the phone shivered involuntarily.

The ringing started. Once, twice, three times, four times, five times, six times, seven times, eight times, nine times.

"Ah, uh, Hello! This is the Kamijou residence, yes!"

"Too slow!"

Kamijou shouted meaninglessly, and after hearing that, the girl on the other side also started to get mad.

"Ah, is this voice Touma? Touma's the one that's slow! When can we eat lunch? Or should I go to Komoe's house for help? If you don't clearly say beforehand, I'm not going to know what to do!"

"Sorry, Index! We can talk about food later! I have something important to ask you right now!"

“What do you mean later?! Why does Touma always-?”

“Enough already, are you alright over there? Some magician showed up, and I don’t know what they are after, but they could be coming after you again! Tsuchimikado, that guy… he might be back at the dorms by now! Oi, Index! Go next door right now and take a look! That guy is on our side!”

“Touma… are you… being chased right now?”

Index seemed to understand the situation, and her voice became quiet.

“That’s right! I’m running madly for my life right now! If possible, please give me some advice that’ll let me turn the current situation around!”

“…What’s the magician’s traits? Things like clothes, weapons, the way of speaking, or the way they act.”

Kamijou then mentioned everything he knew about "Unabara Mitsuki" to Index, including how he had changed into somebody else’s appearance and the stone knife he wielded.

After three seconds of short silence, Index replied, “The black stone knife is obsidian, right? A spear made by using a mirror to reflect starlight… that should be the Spear of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli.”

“Tlah… what?”

“Spear of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli. It’s the name for the Aztec god of Venus and disasters; supposedly, his Spear can kill anyone that is under the light of Venus.”

Kamijou froze. No matter what that legend was, it was way too preposterous. If that stone knife had that kind of power, humankind would’ve been gone from the world by now.

“What Venus… Index, you can skip the introduction. Anyway, what do I do now? I want to quickly—”

A loud *Boom* cut off Kamijou’s whining.

The mysterious attack went past Kamijou’s side and hit an air conditioner.

Kamijou involuntarily broke out in a cold sweat all over, and swiftly turned a corner.

“Touma! If you don’t listen carefully, the one in trouble is going to be you!”

“Sorry! Index-sama! I won’t complain to things experts say again! Please tell me some suggestions now! Immediately!”

“Mm, first, that Spear is made from the light of Venus, remember that.”

Kamijou couldn’t help but look up. In the sky between the buildings… Venus couldn’t be seen. But that didn’t mean "Venus didn’t exist"—just that "the sunlight was too bright to be able to see Venus".

“But that’s unreasonable, right? Everybody in the world is under the light of Venus. If the power of the Spear is as you say, no one can escape its power and humans would be extinct now, right?”

“Yeah, that’s why it’s classed as god-level magic—but that’s also its flaw, as humans can’t completely control magic used by gods.”

“What does that mean?”

“Simply put, humans can only use a replica of the Spear. If the real Spear was used, all humans would die. I think the theory behind the replica should be using the obsidian knife as a mirror? The light of Venus from the sky gets reflected by the mirror and reaches the enemy as the Spear. On the other hand, if you don’t get hit by the light, then you can avoid the attack by the Spear. If properly handled, Touma’s right hand can block the attack, too; the main point is how to find the unseen path of attack."

“Light that can’t be seen… basically, a laser weapon roughly the size of a pistol?”

“What’s a laser?”

He could imagine Index tilting her head in puzzlement on the other side of the phone.

Maybe it’s because he was splitting his concentration that Kamijou kicked a

bicycle accidentally. Kamijou tilted forward, and barely avoided falling down onto the ground.

Boom!, behind him came a frightening sound.

Kamijou looked back, and the fallen bicycle had already been disassembled by the unseen attack into frames and wheels. It seemed like the accuracy of the magician's Spear wasn't really that high. Kamijou saw the magician behind him raising the knife once more and quickly turned a corner.

"Dammit, that guy's actually shooting something like that… At least look at the surroundings, you idiot!"

"Mm… the spell technique is like a blueprint; magic itself is only a phenomenon. As long as the technique isn't leaked out, even if the magic is seen, it wouldn't matter. Even if people without magic knowledge witness the phenomenon, they can't reverse-engineer the blueprint."

"Uh… that wasn't what I was trying to say."

Kamijou sighed, and turned down an even narrower side path.

Even though every second counted right now, there were still questions left to ask.

"Dammit, so that means how this guy turned into Unabara is also a kind of Aztec magic?"

"That's right, the Aztec priests have a technique that skins a sacrifice alive and allows them to wear their skin; this magic should be derived from that technique."

Kamijou gasped.

Even though he knew that the situation right now was dangerous, Kamijou was still shocked enough to almost stop running.

"What… did you say about the skin?"

"Cut it off with a knife and wear it, though if it's just for changing appearances,

there’s no need to go that far; just cutting off fifteen centimeters of the skin from the forearm and turning it into a charm is enough to give a certain amount of transformation effect.”

A horrible feeling started creeping from Kamijou’s fingertips. The pursuer behind him now felt even more frightening.

“That’s way too scary, actually skinning people to change appearances. Magicians really are all lunatics!”

“Oi, Touma, what you’re saying is job discrimination–!”

With no time to hear her babbling on, Kamijou turned off the phone.

The small side street was a lot shorter than Kamijou had expected, and he was now back on the main road. Kamijou hurriedly ran towards the side street across the road. Behind him came a few more frightening sounds of the "Spear" disassembling something.

(Should I run into a building? No, if the outer walls are gone, I’ll be buried alive! Not knowing the attack range is a problem. If I run into an underground street, I might still be buried alive!)

As Kamijou ran, he tried to understand the situation. The reason the magician was after him probably had something to do with Index, right? She was a library of grimoires, with 103,000 of them in her memory. The possibility of magicians from all over the world coming after her wasn’t exactly low.

Though if that was the case, there was still something hard to understand. Why had that magician transformed into Unabara Mitsuki? Unabara was Mikoto’s friend, and had no direct connection with Kamijou and Index. If he wanted to assassinate Kamijou, then shouldn’t he have transformed into someone closer to Kamijou…?

Kamijou rushed to turn another corner.

“Dammit!”

Kamijou cursed. The path in front of him was blocked due to the building next to it being under construction. Spades, bags of cement, and building machinery

filled the narrow path; it was impossible to pass. On top of the half-constructed building was a crane, moving materials overhead.

Even so, Kamijou still headed towards the working site, and turned around to look. The "enemy’s" footsteps were closing in from the corner behind him. There was nowhere to run.

(What now? What now?!)

In that instant Kamijou looked around, ‘Unabara Mitsuki’ stepped out from around the corner. As soon as he saw Kamijou, he raised his black stone knife.

The distance between the two was only five meters.

But Kamijou didn’t choose to swing his fist at "Unabara Mitsuki", instead grabbing a spade next to him. During this time, "Unabara Mitsuki" waved his black knife in the light, adjusting the angles bit by bit. Kamijou felt sweat covering his palms, and swung the spade down hard.

But his target wasn’t "Unabara"; it was the cement bag next to him.

With a swish, the spade stabbed through the bag. Kamijou continued the swing, and spreads the cement dust around them.

"Unabara’s" view, surroundings, and the sky were swallowed by the gray dust.

"Unabara" ignored it and swung the knife. At this point, he noticed something.

The Spear didn’t activate.

The link between Venus and the mirror was blocked by the cement dust. In this situation, the Spear made by the light of Venus couldn't be used.

Swish! Something heavy flew past "Unabara Mitsuki’s" cheek.

He lowered himself, thinking it was probably the spade.

“Ooooooooohhhh!!”

Kamijou’s fist pierced through the gray curtain and reached for him. "Unabara" reflexively bent down and avoided the fist. There wasn’t any reason—just

instinct. Sweating, "Unabara" raised the obsidian knife, which was now only a normal weapon, and tried to slash it across Kamijou’s face. But "Unabara" hadn’t stabilized himself beforehand, so the attack wasn’t very powerful. The tip of Kamijou’s foot swung with the sound of the wind, and impacted the stomach of the bent-down "Unabara".

"Unabara" jumped back, trying to minimize the damage.

He noticed that battling in the cement dust was disadvantageous for him, and decided to move back.

"Unabara" continued to move back another few steps, but Kamijou, moving faster, caught up to him instantly. From the structure of the human legs, their speed going forward was obviously faster than moving back. Kamijou was about to swing his fist once more, so "Unabara" hurriedly raised his obsidian knife to try and counter it.

Whoosh!

At that instant, a sudden gust blew through the small alley.

The gray mist that covered everything was suddenly gone. The sky, partially blocked by the surrounding buildings, was once again visible. The grace of the light of Venus once again descended onto "Unabara".

Unabara raised his knife and corrected the angle.

Kamijou, who was closing in, now showed surprise.

“Hmph! Accept your fate!”

The angle’s set, connecting Venus, mirror, and the target. Focus the mana, chant the incantation, and the starlight would turn into a spear that couldn’t be seen, and would pierce directly through the enemy!

The symbol of Venus and disasters, the Spear of Tlahuizcalpantecuhtli.

Kamijou, in his panic, raised his right hand...

But was unable to determine the unseen path of attack.

Theoretically, this blow would move through the gap in the right hand’s defense and pierce the heart.

But nothing happened.

“What…?”

"Unabara Mitsuki" involuntarily said that. To release the Spear, several conditions had to be met simultaneously—but the strike just then should have met those conditions; there was no reason for failure. The Spear should have been released, gone straight through Kamijou’s heart, and split his body cleanly like meat at the butchers.

"Unabara" looked at his obsidian knife with an expression like examining a flashlight that had ran out of power.

"Unabara" was astonished.

The obsidian knife in his hand had a layer of rough gray dust sticking to its surface. Just like a blackboard duster thick with chalk dust, its original color couldn’t even be seen.

The role of the obsidian knife was to be a mirror, aiming to adjust and reflect the light of Venus that descended from the sky.

If the mirror was no longer reflective, it couldn’t connect the target with the light of Venus.

Pah! The sounds of Kamijou’s footsteps rang out.

He was now right in front of "Unabara".

“?!”

If "Unabara" had discarded the obsidian knife and changed his tactics, then he might still have had a chance to win. But "Unabara" couldn’t help but try and wipe off the dust on the obsidian knife. It wasn’t hard to understand. Comparing an equal chance of winning or losing by hand-to-hand combat with the sure-kill magic, anyone would choose the latter option. "Unabara" lost to the temptation of "just wiping off the dust with a single sweep".

The result was that he couldn’t react to the Kamijou's attack in time.

A *Don!* sound bursts out. "Unabara" was smashed into the ground, and the obsidian knife that he clung to until the last second finally left his hands.

Part 16

August 31, 12:36 PM.

Kamijou looked at the "Unabara Mitsuki" that was now fallen to the ground.

After "Unabara’s" face had been punched, the surface of his whole face had turned to dust accompanied by the sound of glass cracking. Underneath it was a magician’s face, looking younger than the real Unabara, and also with a darker skin tone. There were still pieces of Unabara’s skin left on his face, making it look surreal—almost like skin that had been burnt black by the sun being ripped off unceremoniously.

“Alright, now speak honestly,” Kamijou said while panting. “Why did you transform into Unabara Mitsuki?”

“Ha, even if I don’t say it clearly, can’t you understand it?”

“Understand it, my ass. Transforming into Unabara wouldn’t help in attacking me, right? Why did you go after Unabara? Just to get close to Misaka? Is it because she’s my friend, so you’d finish her off as well?”

“…”

“Answer me. I’ve heard that your transforming technique is by peeling off Unabara’s skin; did you plan to do the same thing to Misaka? Misaka has nothing to do with the magic side; why do you magicians want to drag her into this?”

Kamijou seemed to be agitated, but Unabara's tone was somewhat calm.

Plain and emotionless, the words flowed slowly from his mouth.

"Unabara should have been erased."

His voice wasn't cold like ice, but rather more like lukewarm water where emotion wasn't fluctuating.

"But at the point of death, he used his esper ability… Telekinesis. He changed every particle in his body into a solid block, going into a false death—maybe cryogenic stasis is a better term. Stabbing his heart was like stabbing a frozen slab of meat; no damage could be done. Not even the Spear could take him apart. I had no other ideas, so I could only tie him up and lock him in the room…"

It looked like this magician had done a lot of research on Academy City to be using scientific jargon such as Telekinesis and cryogenic stasis.

But what surprised Kamijou more was the overly plain voice. It sounded like forcing an old cassette to play that had nearly fallen apart.

Unabara seemed a bit satisfied looking at Kamijou's face, and his voice gradually gained emotion.

"You ask what my aim in coming here is? I didn't think that this would be your first question in this situation."

Unabara seemed to laugh at Kamijou from the bottom of his heart, and continued to speak. "Looks like you have no idea how dangerous your actions are."

"What are you saying?"

"You don't just have the 103,000 grimoires of Index Librorum Prohibitorum in your possession; you also have magicians of the Anglican Church, Tokiwadai's Level 5 esper, the trump card against vampires, and all sorts of other people gathered to your side."

The magician said in a tone like he was laughing at himself.

"The magic side and the science side were originally two worlds that could not

coexist, but you are building an organization that incorporates both worlds. The Kamijou Faction can now almost be called a separate entity. The organization that I belong to is afraid that a new organization like yours will destroy the world's balance of power."

Organization.

Like Academy City, the Christian Churches, a magic cabal, or some other major country?

"That's why I was sent here, though my mission in the beginning wasn't to transform into Unabara or to eliminate anyone. I've only been in this city for a month, and transforming into Unabara was also only a week ago. The original mission was just surveillance. All I needed to do was to make sure that the Kamijou Faction had no influence to the balance of power, report to my superiors that 'there's no problem', and finish the mission."

The magician clenched his teeth.

"But you are too dangerous! From the bits and pieces I've gathered, in just this summer vacation period, you've already destroyed several organizations! Not only so, this faction of yours can't be bought off by money or controlled by brute force. The movements of the Kamijou Faction depend solely on your own emotions and whims! With such a huge unstable power, how can those 'above' possibly leave you alone?!"

"Wait… that that means…"

"That's right. My target isn't just the person known as Kamijou Touma, but all members in the Kamijou Faction. At this point, even if only you are killed, the bonds between the various members can't be dissolved."

The aim of "transforming" into a friend was this.

"Transform" into one of Kamijou's friends, do some bad things, and lower the trust between members. When there was no further use, "transform" into another friend and do the same things, using such methods to make the faction collapse from the inside.

Even if the fact that "someone is disguised" was discovered, it wouldn't matter;

as long as "who’s been replaced" was not known, it would only drive each member apart, to the point where they no longer trusted each other.

Internal collapse.

Such methods employed by spies had brought down countless dynasties throughout history. Even regimes that looked robust could fall abruptly. A kind king could suddenly turn into a tyrant, manipulated by aides in the shadows. Because of the efficiency of the method and also its cruelty, myths about foxes and demons had been born in some countries.

“I was going to leave you last, but I guess it can’t be helped. As the mask of Unabara Mitsuki has been found out, I’ll have to borrow your face next!”

After that sentence, the magician literally flew towards the obsidian knife on the ground, swiftly wiped off the cement dust, and turned from the ground to release the Spear.

But maybe the position of shooting was too forced that the place the Spear ended up shooting at was nowhere near Kamijou. The magician clucked, stood up, and raised the obsidian knife once more.

But now Kamijou was right in front of the magician.

“Che!”

The magician wanted to release the Spear, but Kamijou’s fist was faster. Kamijou’s right hand impacted the obsidian knife. Maybe Imagine Breaker had worked, as the obsidian knife turned to powder with a sound like glass breaking.

“Did you think I would just wait for you? That’s stup-!”

Kamijou’s words were cut off before he could finish.

The roar of metal clashing together came from above him. Kamijou looked up involuntarily, and saw the steel beams falling from the half-finished building.

Apparently, the Spear that missed had hit the building next to them.

That building hadn’t been filled up with concrete yet, so it looked like a giant

metal cube. The power of the Spear was to disassemble the physical form, so the steel beams had been released from the nuts and bolts holding them together and were starting to rain down onto both Kamijou and the magician.

“?!”

Kamijou and the magician both moved backwards. A metal rod weighing several hundred kilograms stabbed between the two, almost like a holy sword.

Seconds later, the whole building that was under construction started to fall like an avalanche. Using common sense, they should have been running for their lives. But if they ran, the chance of capturing the magician would be gone, and the magician once more would turn into someone else and harm someone close to Kamijou.

Kamijou and the magician came into eye contact.

The magician looked into Kamijou’s eyes, and showed a peculiar smile.

(Dammit! My life is so unlucky!)

Kamijou cursed inside, staring at the magician who also didn’t plan to escape.

“Even though it’s a cliché line… I thought we could’ve been friends.”

The workers who had been doing the construction were now escaping and roaring in anger. All the sounds from the workers were coming from ground level; apparently, nobody had been working on the building at the time. It looked like there shouldn’t be anyone that wouldn’t be able to make it out.

“That thought has never crossed my mind.”

The magician answered without hesitation. A metal rod stabbed into the ground next to him, but there was no change in his expression.

“It’s a shame, really such a shame.” Kamijou sighed and said, “So the thoughts about Misaka that came from your mouth are also false. Only this point makes me feel that this is such a shame… because now, this gives me a reason to beat you to a pulp.”

This sentence froze the air.

A silence colder than darkness enveloped their surroundings.

“…?”

The magician seemed to have said something in a soft voice.

Before Kamijou even had time to frown, he repeated it once more.

“Can’t a fake have those kinds of thoughts?” The magician grinded his teeth and said, “A fake can’t wish for peace? Does a fake not even have the right to have the thought of wanting to protect Misaka-san?”

“Ah…?”

The frightening sound of the collapsing building was now tossed to the back of Kamijou’s mind as he stared at the magician’s face.

“That’s right, I didn’t want to do this.”

The magician continued his words without care of the building that could fall any moment.

“I didn’t even want to harm Unabara. Nobody being hurt in the end is the best conclusion, right? I like this city. From the time I came here a month ago, even though I can’t become a resident of this world, I still deeply loved this world that Misaka-san lives in.”

The magician continued on.

“But I have to do this. Because the results are out, the Kamijou Faction has been judged by those ‘above’ as a dangerous force. Can you understand what I felt when I turned into Unabara? To be forced to destroy the world that Misaka-san exists in, can you understand what I feel?”

The magician now showed raw emotions on his contorted face.

“You couldn’t possibly know! Because you ruined everything! If you were milder in your actions so that I could report back ‘there’s no problem’, I

could’ve left here in peace! That way, I wouldn’t have had to attack Unabara or trick Misaka-san! That’s right, I am your enemy now. But who did you think made things turn out this way?!”

An invisible killing intent radiated from the magician.

As if in reply to his roar, the topmost floor of the building started falling with a *Boom*.

Kamijou looked into the magician’s eyes.

As for the collapsing building, he didn’t even glance at it.

He said, “Do you truly like Misaka?”

As a spy that was planning to use Misaka, these words came from his mouth.

"Yeah," the magician said.

The topmost floor of the building turned into countless steel beams, falling down to the ground one by one.

“You want to protect the world that Misaka lives in?”

Even as the spy that had been planning to use Misaka, these words had come from his mouth.

"Yeah," the magician said.

The countless steel beams smashed into the floors beneath them, resulting in more sections breaking apart.

“But now, that is a dream that can’t come true. Now, I am your enemy. I don’t want to do this, but I have to. I have no other choice, no other path to choose. Or do you want me to be like a hero in the movies, fight against the whole organization by myself, and lose my life for nothing? I can’t do that. I’m not you; I can’t be a hero such as yourself.”

The magician said that, and incredibly showed a plain and weak smile.

“So that’s it.” Kamijou Touma finally understood.

Those were the thoughts of that magician. That man hadn't wanted to become his enemy, but was forced to. That man was forced to destroy what he valued most in this world with his own hands. Such tragedy was what had twisted his heart.

There was a man named Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

When he had first called himself a spy, his casual demeanor really made an impression on Kamijou—but the truth wasn’t that simple. Tsuchimikado had paid a large price, risking the danger of going against his orders in exchange for his freedom.

The magician in front of him now wasn’t willing to take that risk.

It was because he knew clearly how much of a coward he himself was, that it was harder to quench his anger. He hated Kamijou who had destroyed his dream, but he hated himself more for not being able to protect his dream.

Those were the thoughts of that magician.

That man had poured all his twisted thoughts out, and was standing in front of Kamijou to block him.

Kamijou thought that if so, then he must also fight with all his strength.

Kamijou could live his life freely, with nobody to restrain his movements, and could protect whatever he wanted to protect at any time. The Kamijou like this had to bring a lot more pain to the magician. In the magician’s eyes, Kamijou radiated so much dazzling light that he couldn’t look at him directly.

“Hmph, so the only choice left for you is to choose to kill her with your own hands?”

Even so, Kamijou still decided to fight with all his strength.

Against someone who spoke his thoughts, Kamijou couldn’t just deal with him half-heartedly.

“Apparently, I’ll have to kill that fantasy of yours first.”

The avalanche at the top of the building was almost like a giant’s hand crushing

the whole structure.

Steel beams fell down like raindrops, but neither Kamijou nor the magician looked up or tried to retreat. They only clenched their fists and charged, attempting to shrink the distance between the two to zero in as little time as possible!

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Kamijou’s fist impacted the magician’s face. The magician from the start didn’t seem to plan on dodging; he unhesitatingly grabbed Kamijou’s chest with both hands, and slammed Kamijou into a wall. With a dull sound, the air inside Kamijou’s lungs was forced out.

The magician pushed Kamijou into the wall before using both his hands to strangle him. Kamijou aimed for the magician’s stomach and kicked out. Maybe the magician had been relying on magic too much and hadn’t trained his body as he doubled over after the kick.

Suddenly, a huge sound erupted from the steel beam stabbing down next to Kamijou. What was more, another steel beam struck that beam, resulting in a sound like a church’s bell ringing next to Kamijou’s ears.

“Uu…?!”

Kamijou’s body slightly shook involuntarily.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!”

The magician, who was also shaking, instead tackled Kamijou. Kamijou fell over, and due to the loud noise that hit his brain, his movements had become sluggish. On the other hand, though the magician was moving about like a drunkard, he could still aim precisely, and went to position himself above Kamijou.

Kamijou tried desperately to escape the magician that was trying to subdue him.

“Ah!”

At that time, Kamijou saw it.

A rain of steel beams was falling down, and one of them would pierce through both Kamijou and the magician immediately. It was less than twenty meters above them. There were only a few seconds before impact. The magician was staring at Kamijou beneath him, and didn't realize the existence of the beam about to come down on top of him.

"Dodge it, you idiot!"

Kamijou kicked the magician, who was about to hold him down, in the stomach, and then slapped him once across the face.

The magician's body rolled towards Kamijou's left side, to a lying position… and then he realized the situation.

Then, Kamijou and the magician glanced at each other.

Facing the rain of steel beams, the magician didn't seem like wanting to dodge it. He only smiled—a slight, lonely smile. He understood clearly that even if he won this battle, he wouldn't get anything from it.

Kamijou had no duty to save the magician.

Kamijou wouldn't have been blamed by anyone if he left the enemy for dead.

But…

"—A fake can't wish for peace?"

Even so…

"—Does a fake not even have the right to have the thought of wanting to protect Misaka-san?"

(Ah, dammit! This guy is just too devious!)

Kamijou tried to grab the hand of the magician who was still on the ground. The magician showed a shocked expression, and it made Kamijou even more annoyed. Kamijou knew it was already too late, but he still clenched his teeth.

A large number of steel beams dropped down from the sky, shaking the whole

place.

Part 17

August 31, 12:47 PM.

A large amount of dust obstructed the visibility at the scene.

The people around there had heard the noise, but no one was curious enough to come and see what was going on. If ordinary people wanted to come and look, then they would want to look from a safe place. In a situation like this where nobody knew where was safe, nobody was reckless enough to come close.

"…Haha."

In the middle of all the commotion, Kamijou smiled half-heartedly.

Kamijou ended up sitting on the floor, with a steel beam planted between his legs. Not only that, there were countless steel beams surrounding Kamijou—a lot like a small cottage seriously flawed in design and with a roof full of holes. The steel beams had a delicate balance, as if they would crumble if blown by a breeze. But anyway, Kamijou had escaped the fate of being buried alive.

(Am I just lucky…? That can't be; my luck's one of the worst there is. If that's the case… oh, yeah, that Level 5 esper; if she uses the power to control electricity, controlling magnetism shouldn't be a problem for her.)

That was right, it wasn't good luck at all. The path of the beams had been aligned to pierce through Kamijou. Apparently, some sort of power had changed their path slightly before they fell on Kamijou.

Kamijou, who was afraid that the roof would collapse any moment, looked around. He saw the magician lying between two of the steel beams that held the

roof together.

One of the magician's hands was stuck in the gap between two steel beams. Though the magician's hand hadn't been crushed, but was instead stuck in a natural gap, it was like a super-heavy handcuff had been put on him.

The magician was incredulous at the fact that he was still alive, and was stunned for a few moments.

After a while, he finally said, "Did I lose?"

"I don't know, I didn't create this situation."

Kamijou said that while scratching his head. But the magician shook his head. No matter the reason, he couldn't even move an inch; fighting on in this situation was impossible.

"Guess it's my loss." The magician smiled slightly. "That way, my part in all this comes to an end. I don't have to kill Misaka-san, or kill anyone else now, right?"

"…"

Kamijou didn't answer; he just looked at the magician.

Carefully thinking back, maybe in his heart, the magician had always been conflicted. Even though he had been serious about trying to kill Kamijou, his heart had been clouded and that may have held him back unconsciously—because once he emerged victorious in this battle, he'd have to kill Mikoto with his own hands.

If he had used the Spear as his first attack, Kamijou wouldn't have had time to dodge and would have died then and there. When chasing Kamijou in the straight streets, after carefully thinking about it, he probably had several chances to accurately hit Kamijou in the back.

That magician didn't want to hurt Misaka Mikoto.

He didn't want to destroy the world that Misaka Mikoto lived in.

But his selfish wish was hard to make come true. If it did, then his own life

would be in danger, so he needed an excuse. Something like "I tried my best, but due to obstacles, I failed to complete the objective".

The enemy organization treated the "group led by the amateur Kamijou" as a very dangerous group, so even though Kamijou was an amateur in combat, but his position, almost like the boss of an organization, definitely qualified for the "I tried my best" excuse.

“I think…” the magician said, “The attacks won’t just stop here. One failure by a small fry like me won’t be enough to convince the ‘above’ to give up. Instead, this will make them even more sure that the judgment of ‘Kamijou Faction is very dangerous’ is correct. My allies might appear next to you or Misaka-san; in the worst-case scenario, I might get the same order again.”

Kamijou silently listened to the magician’s words.

“Can I ask you to protect her?”

The magician asked.

“No matter where, no matter when, no matter who your opponent is, no matter how many times, as long as something like this happens, you’ll have to be a hero and go to her side to protect her. Can you promise me this?”

It was what he dreamed of but could never bring into reality.

It was his dearest wish, but he didn’t have a choice other than to give the opportunity to someone else.

And then…

Kamijou only said one sentence.

And then nodded.

“That’s the worst possible answer,” the magician lying on the ground said lightly while smiling.

Part 18

August 31, 12:37 PM.

Misaka Mikoto held the hamburger-filled paper bag in her arms, leaned her back on the wall around the corner from the two, and listened to their conversation.

Mikoto didn’t hear everything in their conversation, though. When Mikoto found out that there were two Unabara Mitsukis and one of them had started fighting with Kamijou, she had chased after the two of them. Then she had seen Unabara’s face fall off like a mask, showing a completely different face; and after that, the half-finished building had collapsed, incomprehensible things coming one after another. Also, Mikoto was pretty far away from the two, so she could only hear parts of their conversation. Mikoto, who had spent much effort a moment ago to change the path of the steel beams, might have been the one out of the three of them whose emotions were most in turmoil.

But even so, Mikoto still understood vaguely.

Mikoto understood the reason they were fighting.

Why they had fought.

And for whom they had fought.

Mikoto shook her head vigorously.

(I… I can't misunderstand! I must be getting the wrong idea! His words definitely don't have those meanings to it! He's that kind of person; it's not like he's treating me as someone special!)

But her head that was shaking vigorously to deny this still stopped moving involuntarily.

Even though she knew she shouldn't get the wrong idea, her head still stopped.

(Uu…)

Mikoto leaned her head on the wall behind her. She knew that she was blushing bright red without having to look in a mirror.

(It's really unforgivable,) Mikoto thought. After hearing that kind of conversation in this situation, what kind of expression was she going to have when she walked out of here?

Especially the last sentence Kamijou had said.

(…I know I'm misunderstanding, but the way you said it is too easy for it to be mistaken otherwise, you big idiot!)

Mikoto sighed. She didn't know how long it would take for the blush on her face to finally subside.

August 31, 1:04 PM.

END

Chapter 3: A Certain Misaka's Final Signal.
Tender_or_Sugary.

Part 1

August 31, 5:20 PM.

The research facility Accelerator was entering was rather large.

There were 3 giant warehouse-like buildings in front of him. These buildings were the development facilities of the Sisters, the 20,000 Sisters who had been used in the experiment had all been nurtured here. There was a pile of metal platforms in the buildings, and there were numerous cylindrical plastic capsules that were stacked all the way to the ceiling. The place looked like a library shelf that was stacked with books.

Beside the 3 huge buildings, there was a building that was called a research center.

It was a 2-story rectangular metal and concrete building, and it was a lot smaller than the nurturing facility. It was hard to imagine that it was the core of the research center.

Accelerator was standing in front of the research center.

There was a visual scanning machine at the door, but Accelerator ignored it. His ID pass should have been ineffective now. Accelerator knocked on the door lightly, and the 'impact' gathered at the door, breaking the metal lock precisely.

“Creak...”

With this light sound, the door slowly opened, like in some sort of old Western

style building.

The inside looked more like a computer simulation room than a research center. A machine was arranged all over the walls and looked like it used a large cooler. It was said to be the latest quantum computer, but nobody could tell that it was just some outdated experimental-use tool. At least it didn't seem like it could replace the Tree Diagram's functions. The numerous screens let out a mysterious light in this windowless room. Large amounts of information continued to be printed out from the printers, and the papers covered the floor. The only thing one could hear was the bellowing of a cooling fan.

Though this room didn't look like it was meant for research, it wasn't that much different. If this was used for an evolution experiment on artificial life or for testing a plane model's air resistance, maybe it was to be expected for them to have such a facility.

A woman was sitting in the middle of the research lab.

Before the 'experiment' ended, there had been 20+ researchers crammed into this room, but everyone had already disappeared. That woman seemed to have understood this, which was why she was not sitting on a chair, but on a table. She was holding papers of information from the printer, and marking them with a red pen. There was no need for courtesy in this room anymore.

“Hm? Ah, you came back, Accelerator. Your ID's still effective for 90 days, so you didn't need to destroy the door.”

The woman hadn't noticed that Accelerator had walked into the room, but only lifted up her head and noticed Accelerator once her focus on the information was interrupted.

Yoshikawa Kikyou.

She was already over 25 years old, but she didn't have any makeup on. She was wearing a faded old pair of jeans and a T-shirt that was worn out after it had been washed too many times. Only the white lab coat that was draped over the T-shirt was as fresh and white as a new shirt.

Accelerator stared at the papers in Yoshikawa's hand, and then to the thick stack of papers that were being printed out from the source. A large number of papers were scattered all over the floor.

Right now, the 'experiment' was paused; as this 'experiment' had been planned through the Tree Diagram simulations, right now, people found that the simulations were wrong.

But the 'experiment' was merely paused and not ceased. They could restart the 'experiment' once they found the 'error' in the simulations and corrected it.

However, Accelerator didn't think that they would find that 'error'. The Tree Diagram's method of simulation wasn't especially complicated, but the calculations were really too big. The '1 X 10 = 10' function that humans used would be calculated as '1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 = 10' by the machine. To the machine, this may be easier, but to the one who calculated wrongly, this was a nightmare. It was likely that they would need several decades just to look through these vast numbers.

“Such a hardworking person. Is it really interesting to read all these?”

“Not at all. If possible, I really want to ask for your help. Your calculations and analytical ability are rather reliable.”

“It shouldn't be good if I know of the contents of the plan, right?”

The main aim of the 'experiment' was to have 20,000 battles, and let Accelerator go through the plan and eliminate the 20,000 enemies. The skills of an esper could increase through battle, and the final aim of the 'experiment' was to use a controlled growth and let Accelerator level up from a Level 5 to a Level 6.

In that situation, if Accelerator knew too much, maybe the battles wouldn't go on according to the 'plan'. Thus, Accelerator had been warned not to touch the data of the 'experiment' if it wasn't necessary.

At this moment, Yoshikawa Kikyou looked up from the pile of data and said,

“Don't worry, I'm not checking the simulation figures of the Tree Diagram.”

“What? Do you have enough time to toss the large figures aside and handle everything else? Or have you abandoned the 'experiment'?”

“I suppose when the figures are analyzed completely, you may be at the end of a long life. So as for your question, my answer is a 'yes'. At least for me, the data here is more important than the 'experiment'.”

Yoshikawa sounded rather anxious, But Accelerator didn't care at all. Right now, what he wanted was an incubator that could let Last Order develop her incomplete body, all the associated equipment, and the knowledge of how to use them.

He looked around. The folders, notebooks, discs, data reports and the like were all scattered on the floor. It was like a hurricane had just struck, nobody knew what was what anymore.

“Oi, where's the instruction manual to the Sisters adjustments? Physically and mentally...I want to learn how to install the nurturing and learning mechanisms. Also, lend me a working adjustment equipment. Don't ask me why, treat it as a favor because you didn't pay me after the 'experiment' got paused.”

Hearing Accelerator say this, Yoshikawa seemed rather shocked.

“Hold on, how did you know about this? Even I only knew of this 3 hours ago.”

“What?”

“Isn't it about this?”

Yoshikawa said as she waved the pile of printed papers in her hand.

It was the learning mechanism simulation script.

The Sisters were Misaka Mikoto's clones, made through unique nurturing tools, which needed approximately 14 days. The Sisters couldn't just 'learn' a personality as the time was too short.

Thus, their personalities and knowledge were from so-called learning mechanisms—basically, it was a brainwashing machine that introduced electrical flow into the brain; it was somewhat like inserting data into a hard disk.

In other words, what Yoshikawa was holding was equivalent to that of the Sisters 'Soul Diagram'.

“What are your researching this for?”

“Can't you tell? I'm eliminating errors.”

Yoshikawa used the red pen to make marks on the paper and said,

“I only knew of this 3 hours ago, so I haven't finished yet.”

Accelerator frowned.

After a while, Yoshikawa's red pen suddenly stopped.

“Right now, I'm picking out errors in the personality files. No, it's more like a human command code, or maybe I should call it a virus.”

“...Hold on, what are you saying now?”

“Though not all the Sisters personality files were destroyed, if a Sister loses control, the virus may be spread to the other Sisters, so this is really dangerous.”

Yoshikawa shook her head, and said,

“That's right, I haven't mentioned it to you before. The Sisters have a very unique unit called 'Last Order'.”

Last Order.

Accelerator had a bad feeling about this, as if an electrical surge occurred in the back of his brain.

“What did you say...that brat is?”

“You just called her 'brat', seems like you met her before...so this means that the child never left this city?”

Yoshikawa twirled the red pen and said, “Alright, I'll spill out all the information regarding Last Order and the current situation to you. You may have heard about some of these. These things are important, so listen carefully.”

After saying this, Yoshikawa got off the table and sat on the chair. She pointed at a chair for Accelerator to sit down, but Accelerator ignored it.

Accelerator didn't like Yoshikawa's style of doing things; it was as if she was a teacher in an ordinary world.

“In fact, that child wasn't created for the 'experiment'. Do you know that?”

“What did you say? I thought that those were inferior clones of the Railgun that were meant for me to kill them.”

“That's right, but do you remember how many battles are required for the 'experiment'?”

“20,000, isn't it? I always wondered why the number is so exact—”

After saying this, Accelerator suddenly noticed the problem.

“That's right. That child's serial number is 20,001. Seems like you know this; the child isn't a unit that's to be used in the 'experiment'. Basically, she's a failsafe.”

Yoshikawa sighed, and then said,

“Think about it. We created 20,000 espers. What if they revolt against us? We don't even have 20 workers, can we even handle them?”

“So that brat is your trump card? What is she? Some artificial Level 5?”

“We couldn't create that thing, and even if we did so, it's meaningless. Wouldn't it be useless if an artificial Level 5 joins in the revolt as well? Since she's a failsafe, we had to have a system of more trustworthiness to allow us researchers with zero attack to handle them.”

“?”

“Have you heard of the Misaka Network?”

Accelerator frowned. If he remembered correctly, it referred to the phenomenon of linking all the Sisters through brainwaves. The Misaka Network itself had a large hive mind that could control every single 'Misaka'.

“Last Order is the opposite of the other Sisters. We just need to insert a special code in her to take control of the Misaka Network. In other words, it means that if an emergency occurs, we can handle 20,000 Misaka's by giving a stop signal to prevent them from betraying us.”

“So it's like...a breathing keyboard?”

Accelerator wondered. Though it was cruel, it was basically how the researchers here did things. Even if it was the other Sisters, they were basically human-shaped targets that were abandoned.

It was no wonder that Last Order felt somewhat different from the others. So her body and mind were deliberately maintained at an immature stage.

“So what's with the error on that brat? You just called it a virus, didn't you?”

“After the 'experiment' ended, Last Order was still secretly kept within this incubator. A week ago, we suddenly detected that her brainwaves became abnormal, but once we hurried down and opened the warehouse, that child was gone. It was damaged from the inside.”

Yoshikawa stroked the printed pages with her fingertips.

“At that moment, we didn't really know what was going on, so we just treated it as if she went berserk due to reasons unknown. The workers inside are in charge of looking for her.”

“What? You haven't sought out Anti-Skill or Judgment yet?”

“We couldn't. Although we've gotten permission from the higher ups, the 'experiment' still isn't something we can openly declare.”

“So you just let her continue to run till today? An entire week? Don't you people lack a sense of danger? Isn't that brat the one controlling 10,000 Sisters?”

“It's because we were overconfident in our system that we were too careless. We never expected for her to escape. Besides, that child shouldn't be able to survive outside the incubator, and we really underestimated the seriousness of this situation...really, that child actually managed to live past 7 days, and that's already unexpected. We shouldn't have made her that sturdy...maybe it's because

we unknowingly put all our feelings into her?”

Hearing this, Accelerator smirked.

Yoshikawa didn't seem to notice his expression.

“Thinking about it, this should be a self-defense mechanism on the child's part. Someone inserted some malicious process into Last Order's brain and caused her to leave the facility to protect herself. I suppose that child probably didn't know why she had to leave.”

Even Yoshikawa herself had only realized this 3 hours ago.

At first, Yoshikawa had wanted to call up all the researchers and come up with a countermeasure, but she hadn't been able to get even one. It seemed like the researchers didn't want to admit the fact that they had been involved in this project.

“But that brat doesn't seem like she intended to escape. She even came to me for help and wanted me to contact the researchers.”

“What did you say? Hold on, when did you last see her? How many hours ago? Also, why did she ask you?”

“Didn't I say that already? She pestered me. To be honest, no matter how much she begs or cries in front of me, do you think that I would automatically talk to her?”

“...What's going on?”

Yoshikawa put her hand on her forehead as she wondered and sunk into deep thought. Maybe it was because her brain was spinning so fast that her face looked as immobile as a statue.

“That malicious process you just talked about is—ah, I know it's something bad even without asking. Seeing how you're talking about this, that brat should be the administrator of all the Sisters.”

Accelerator recalled the conversation at the restaurant.

—“The relationship between the brainwaves link and the 'Misaka' unit is like a sudden nerve touch and a brain cell.”

“That's right. I printed out all her personality files in order to find the reason why she escaped and the destination. But looking closely, there are codes jumbled up all over the place. I managed to find a few, but these malicious codes have some fake codes scattered all around, so it's really hard to remove them. And as for these malicious codes...”

“What's in it?”

“I haven't analyzed it completely, so I can't be sure, but if I go by my hypothesis, the symptoms indicate that they will end up attacking any human without discrimination.”

Yoshikawa paused, and then continued,

“I found the virus activation time, 01 September 00 hour 00 minute 00 second. When it's time, the virus will start to activate the system, and it will be complete 10 minutes later. The virus will be spread to the Sisters through the Misaka Network and cause them to go berserk. At that point, nobody can stop them. Though those children can't go up against you, they can easily wield a Metal Eater. Also, they have 10,000, so the number can't be underestimated.”

“...Oi, this means...”

“That's right, it's exactly what you think.”

Yoshikawa said with a stiff voice. She was not calm; her thoughts had already ceased.

Accelerator was now grasping the meaning behind Yoshikawa's words.

Right now, about 10,000 Sisters had been sent 'outside' Academy City—all over the world to have body adjustments. Considering the time and distance, it was impossible to use all the espers in Academy City and defense forces Anti-Skill or Judgment to stop them.

The Sisters that went berserk and attacked others would most likely have to be

dealt with by the people of the outside world. And it would be impossible to cover up a terrorist attack that involved 10,000 espers attacking at the same time. Then, if they found out that these espers who had launched the terrorist attacks were clones, there would be a lot more problems. Even if a few of the Sisters were able to escape by a miracle, they would be mercilessly dealt with on the basis of being a dangerous threat.

As all the organizations all over the world 'outside' Academy City were helping them in the adjustments, this would drastically decrease their impression of Academy City. This was a scandal of 10,000 clones revolting. If such a thing ended up causing Academy City to lose the support of the outside world, no matter how big Academy City was, it wouldn't be able to survive on its own.

As for what would happen next, nobody could guess.

Maybe Academy City would dissolve, and the researchers who lost their jobs would bring this unknown technology to all the military institutes in other countries. Or maybe Academy City would be afraid that it would be dissolved and start a worldwide invasion with their latest weapons and espers.

No matter the outcome, it would cause a severe tip in the balance of world power and create a worldwide terror. In the worst case scenario, it could lead to war, and not simply a war between Academy City and the rest of world. It wouldn't be just a small shift, but a worldwide loss of balance. It would cause all the minor differences in the countries, races, religions, and thoughts to be a decisive trigger for a war and the map would be tattered, like a whole puzzle dropped onto the floor.

The end of the world.

Accelerator understood what these words meant. Because he also had 'the power to destroy the world', he understood it better than others.

No matter how the world was destroyed, Accelerator may have been able to survive. Even if the center of the world was distorted, he could still remain unharmed on a street when the walls crumble around him.

But that was a world of nothing. No convenience store, no electricity, not even a can of coffee. He could only hunt or pick fruits, put it over a fire and live a primitive life. No, if they used a nuclear missile, maybe even plants and animals

would be extinct. If that happens, he could only eat dirt to survive. At that point, he would regret that he was too strong and couldn't die. The limit of being too powerful was that he would become the lowest tier in the food chain.

Humans created civilizations. If there weren't any humans, civilizations wouldn't exist.

That was how the so-called zen was achieved.

“Ha! How interesting, way too interesting! To think that I will get involved with the end of the world. I've always thought that that was my mission.”

Accelerator sneered and said,

“Oh yeah, it's not too late to send out Anti-Skill and Judgment now, right? Though this city is big, it's still a sealed one. They'll definitely find Last Order through a human wave tactic throughout every single inch of land. Besides, that brat isn't wary at all. She just followed me onto the streets and went to eat.”

“I said it before. We can't call the cops. Think of what we did. Though the higher ups did agree to our 'experiment', it doesn't mean that we can reveal the 'experiment' so openly. And also--”

"Also what?"

"In the end, this method won't be able to save the Sisters. If Last Order is caught and brought by people not involved in this, the fact that '20,000 Sisters may potentially go berserk' will be exposed. This reason will be more than enough to let them get punished."

"But you can't even catch that brat, right?"

"I can't talk back about that. Though that child doesn't have the instincts to run for her life, but her basic movements are based on the 'experimental extermination plan' in the Misaka Network. That child is basically living a street urchin's life, not using money and ID at all, so she won't leave any trace behind. There are blind spots on the satellite cameras as well, and if she can avoid the security robots' cameras, she won't be caught. Oh yeah, how long has it been since you last separated from the child? Have the other organizations realized

this? In this situation, it will be troublesome if she gets kidnapped."

Her words seemed to imply that Yoshikawa was concerned about her own welfare, but she also did sound like she was really worried for Last Order's safety.

On seeing Yoshikawa like this, Accelerator slid his tongue 'tch'.

Among the researchers, she was one of the most naive. It was impossible to identify one Sister from another since they have the same genes, but she had still insisted on remembering every Sister's face. She had also tried to give each Sister an individual name other than their serial number.

But in the end, she was just naive, not kind. If she were kind, she would have stepped up to argue against the 'experiment'. That was right, like that boy and girl.

Yoshikawa didn't seem to notice Accelerator staring at her.

"However, it seems like this subconscious command to 'escape' is only against us 'researchers'. It seems like she's not wary against you...yes, if we can use that, maybe we have a chance of salvaging this."

The last sentences seemed to be some random muttering to herself, but it had reached Accelerator's ears clearly, causing him to frown. He didn't want to become a pawn of the researchers, so he immediately diverted the question.

"Oh yeah, you just said that it's a virus? Not an error? Is this some trigger set up by a secret agent sent by a warmonger? Or is this some smart move set up by a failing war factory that wants to pump itself back?"

"Amai Ao."

Yoshikawa just simply answered this question from Accelerator

Accelerator frowned. He did see that person when he went to eat at the restaurant with Last Order. But if the culprit was really Amai Ao, why would he still appear in Academy City? It had been a week since the incident happened, and logically, he should be 'outside' Academy City...

At this moment, Yoshikawa continued,

"After that incident, he's the only researcher who's still missing. We only received an email from him stating that he wanted to take a vacation."

"Just because of that?"

Accelerator looked around the entire room.

Most likely, only the weirdest of the weirdos would continue to come to work at a company that wouldn't pay money. Accelerators felt that it was not shocking for Amai to run to other organizations to promote himself or become a cashier at a convenience store, since pretty much everyone else was doing the same thing.

Seeing the suspicion in Accelerator's eyes, Yoshikawa explained,

"He was the superintendent of the Radio Noise project that got bottlenecked, and joined us in the 'experiment' by deciding to use the Sisters as the experimental substitutes. His specialty is the writing of the Testament's personality files. Basically, he's the one that understands the Sisters' personalities best. In terms of the structure, there's basically no one that can sneak new codes into those children's brains. Besides, before he left, someone witnessed him installing a Testament. But for some reason, he deleted the user history."

"Hasn't he revealed too much already? And why is he so kind to set the activation day as today? If he really wanted the end of the world, why can't he just let the virus activate once he installs it? Is there a need for him to wait for a week?"

"I suppose you shouldn't ask me, but him, right? But if I have to make a guess,"

Yoshikawa sighed,

"Perhaps he's waiting for the Sisters to mix into the environments of the 'outside' as they wait for their adjustments. In order to create a natural scenario of them 'going berserk after being peaceful', he has to allow the thought of 'the Sisters are reliable' sink into the people around them."

Accelerator remained silent for a while.

He then decided on what to do next.

"Alright, what do you want to do next? How do we prevent the virus from activating in the brat's brain?"

"I'm researching on that now."

Yoshikawa looked really anxious, causing Accelerator to bend down. With a Testament, they could modify Last Order's brain at will. The problem was that there was not much time till the virus activated. She had to find a way to override the virus, find Last Order and insert the code into her brain--to be honest, there's less than 50% chance of that happening.

If so, what should they do?

The answer was simple. If they couldn't find a way to solve this before the last moments, they could only 'eliminate' the infected unit to prevent the rest from getting infected. When that happens, the 9,969 Sisters 'outside' wouldn't be affected by the virus and would continue to live ordinary lives.

They would just need to sacrifice one.

As something was wrong, they could chuck her into the dustbin and erase her.

"...That's why I'm trying not to let that happen. Of course, you can help as well."

Yoshikawa seemed to understand what Accelerator was thinking in his silence.

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to? I'm the guy who killed 10,000 of that brat's companions. How can a bad guy like me save others? I can only kill, I can't save others."

"My answer is that, we're the ones who arranged for that 'experiment'. It's true that you killed more than 10,000 Sisters. But if we could have found a way 'not to kill the Sisters and still upgrade you to a Level 6', I believe you wouldn't have killed them."

"Do you think that I will trust you just because of those words?"

"I can't stop you if you don't want to do it. You can use the remaining time to do

your own things, but you better pray that she dies before the virus activates."

"..."

Accelerator stared at Yoshikawa.

Without changing her expression, she continued to sit in front of Accelerator.

She maintained a straight face and continued,

"I alone can't catch that child. That child has the movement characteristic of 'running away from the researchers without knowing it', and she can detect the weak electromagnetic waves that we researchers give off. Even if we don't appear in front of her, she will run away when she senses it. On the other hand, if we can overcome that, we might be able to get close to her...but the problem is that I can't track her down while decoding the virus. But with you here, the situation is different. If we work together, we may be able to salvage this."

"...Damn you."

Accelerator narrowed his eyes slightly and sunk into silence. This woman was just that irritating. Anyway, she was too naive. She lacked the strength to take up large responsibilities, so her naivety would never grow into kindness.

Compared to the reason that '10,000 Sisters would revolt', the seriousness of which could never be fully realized, the reason that 'Last Order would die' was simple and easy to feel, and therefore much more likely to affect Accelerator. Accelerator was inadvertently amazed by Yoshikawa's psychological tactic. However, though his aim was to bring peace, the method couldn't be called 'kind'.

Yoshikawa held up 2 envelopes, each large enough to hold a large notebook.

"You can help me in 2 ways. The first way is to get Amai Ao out from his hiding place in Academy City and force him to explain the workings of the virus. The other way is to protect Last Order while the virus is still dormant in her. You can choose one. But perhaps you're better at destroying than protecting."

The envelopes slid across the table and stopped in front of Accelerator. Both of them weren't sealed, and their contents spilled out.

--A few photos slid out of the left envelope. They seemed to be taken from a highway speed camera. Among the photos, Amai was sitting in the driver seat of a low framed sports car. There was also a map with red markings all over it.

It seem like Yoshikawa had used all sorts of security facilities to investigate all of Amai Ao's possible hiding spots and movements. She had so much information, yet she couldn't capture him. Either it was because there was not enough manpower, or maybe Amai was too quick in changing hiding places.

--What dropped out from the other envelope on the right was a disk and super-light notepad-sized computer. There was a label on the disk, with the words 'serial 20,001 personality info/before infection' written on it. Maybe too much paper would be used up if she tried to print it.

This envelope contained all of Last Order's personality files. One could predict where she was going to run to through her interests, habits, thoughts, initiatives and actions, track her down and ambush her. However, with how she had looked in the restaurant, Last Order shouldn't be able to move on her own.

"Oi, you just said that you couldn't capture Last Order on your own, right?"

"Yeah. She seems to be moving according to the hiding guideline of the 'experiment' without knowing it. Besides, I'm alone in this, and I can't do all of these."

"But wasn't Amai the one who created these personality files? Since he's a qualified expert, he should be rather skilled in them, right?"

"Knowledge and skills can't be mentioned together. It seemed like he did try to hide himself, but his methods weren't refined enough, so I managed to get a trace of him. But the Sisters are different. They can process all the knowledge in their brains as skills, so Last Order's whereabouts are harder to trace than Amai's. Besides, money flow is another reason. Amai will leave a record once he buys something, but that child can completely disappear on the streets. It should be obvious which one is easier to track down."

"..."

It was obvious which one was more suited for Accelerator.

Accelerator's power was more suited to destroying than protecting others. No, perhaps this wasn't of a technical or theoretical problem now.

“Ah, it's here, finally here, Misaka points at the waitress with her finger. Wah, Misaka as Misaka's food is here.”

He couldn't protect others. He didn't know how to protect others. He couldn't even imagine himself saving others through his power.

“Ohh, this is the first time Misaka's eating such a hot meal, Misaka as Misaka feels really excited. This is great, the entire plate is giving off hot air, Misaka as Misaka continues to stare at it.”

This was no longer of reasoning, but concepts. His power couldn't save anyone. The world he belonged to wouldn't allow him to save anyone.

“But it's Misaka's first time to be eating with someone, Misaka as Misaka answers. Misaka as Misaka recalls that everyone should say 'itadakimasu' before everyone starts eating, and Misaka wants to try that, Misaka as Misaka tries to mention what she wishes for.”

If he just used his power to save someone for once, the common knowledge about him would collapse. 'Accelerator' would no longer exist. The Accelerator who saved others wouldn't be Accelerator at all. One could even say that he got replaced by someone else.

“Yeah, that's right. Anyone can tell which side I will choose.”

Accelerator continued to mutter to himself.

He was not that boy or that girl. There were many others who were more suited to be a savior than him. And unexpectedly, the seats over there were taken, there was no way in.

His power wasn't suited to save others.

His power was only suited to kill others.

Accelerator's mind immediately thought of a certain person's face.

“Humph, laugh at me now, damned brat. I can only choose this side!”

Then, he needed to make a decision. He had to abandon one of the envelopes. Accelerator seemed to give up on struggling as he picked up one.

He took the right one.

The one that had the personality files disks and the notepad-sized computer.

He decided to save that man-made girl called Last Order.

From that moment on, Accelerator was no longer Accelerator.

He stepped up to protect others. He took action to help others. He was going all out to save others. The term 'unsuitable' didn't even describe him now. Anyone who understood him and saw this would think that something was wrong with him, or even declare that 'the Accelerator who says this is definitely a fake'.

His choice was this unbelievable.

One could even say that he had lost all reason to exist as Accelerator.

The boy who was no longer anyone weakly mocked himself,

“If you want to laugh, go ahead. Seems like at this point, I should hope for redemption.”

“Alright, then I'll laugh for you then.”

Yoshikawa stared at the boy as she said this,

“Seem like it's really worth celebrating that you still have such feelings remaining in you. Go ahead and prove that your power can be used to save those precious to you.”

Accelerator didn't answer. He took the envelope with the disk inside and turned to head out the door. “That's why I hate this naïve woman,” he muttered. Then, he said to Yoshikawa.

“Since I agreed to help you researchers, you have to prepare a satisfying reward for me.”

“No problems. I'll take care of that child's body adjustments.”

Yoshikawa Kikyou answered. Without saying anything further, the boy left the research facility.

Part 2

August 31st 6:00 PM.

In the empty research lab, Yoshikawa Kikyou heaved a sigh of relief.

Accelerator appearing there at this critical moment could be said to be a miracle in itself. In fact, if he hadn't appeared, Academy City would have inevitably ended up being dissolved.

Since Accelerator had chosen to save Last Order, the objective that Yoshikawa had was to 'fish out Amai and force him to explain the way to remove the virus'. However, she chose to stay there. Instead of going about running when she was not used to it, she might as well try to decode it herself.

However,

The virus code had numerous traces in the vast personality files, and it was not an easy thing to find them all. Besides, if she accidentally deleted the normal processes, problems would occur. If it was just a memory code, then it would just be a loss of memory. However, if it was a nerve code type that was damaged, then Last Order would lose her life.

“...Ho.”

Yoshikawa picked her face up from the stack of research papers. Though she had said it easily in front of Accelerator, it was not an easy thing to readjust Last Order's body. The problem wasn't the technique, but Yoshikawa herself.

The 'experiment' of the research group was just in stasis, not terminated permanently. In other words, they had to prepare to start the 'experiment' when it happened again. For the researchers, letting Last Order, the core controller of the Sisters, go free was not allowed. Once she did this selfish act, she would have to bear the responsibility.

Yoshikawa was just naïve, not kind.

For example, when the 'experiment' had been at it's end, the 10,000 Sisters had joined forces to manipulate the electric wind turbines all over Academy City and stop Accelerator's attack. If she had used Last Order to send a stop signal through the Misaka Network, she could have prevented the Sisters from taking action. But she hadn't done so.

However, it was not because she hoped they would continue to live on, Yoshikawa merely didn't have a reason to stop them. Her motivation wasn't of 'kindness', she was just afraid that if she stepped up to interfere with the Sisters in the experiment, she would cause irreversible damage to the experiment itself. In other words, she was just naively thinking for herself.

“However.”

Yoshikawa Kikyou made up her mind.

Accelerator had given up his reason to exist in order to save others. That must have been quite the shock to him. 'Saving others with one's own power' may have been a simple thing, but that was the goal that he had already given up on. He originally intended to mock himself for 'only knowing how to kill others' and find a haven for himself by treating himself as a guy that was too late to be saved.

If the Accelerator now knew that he could have used his own power to protect others.

He would be really regretful about this.

Because the deaths of those people who he had defeated in the past were too meaningless.

He would regret not being able to save those people earlier.

But now, Accelerator had decided to face this truth and save a girl. Yoshikawa didn't dare to trample on his intentions. Even if he realized it, it was too late; even if he couldn't turn back now, Yoshikawa couldn't trample on his feelings.

“In the end, I'm just naïve, not kind.”

She muttered to herself. That was right, if she was really a kind person, she wouldn't have asked Accelerator for help and caused Accelerator so much pain. A really kind person wouldn't rely on Accelerator, but would have chosen to settle this alone. Even so, that would cause her to sink into a deeper problem.

But Yoshikawa really hated the naïve her.

In her lifetime, she really wished to be kind for once.

“Seems like it's time for me to eliminate myself.”

Yoshikawa sighed again. She took the pile of data papers and started to prepare the readjustments of Last Order's body. This risky act of saving others wasn't something the naïve yet unkind her would do. In fact, she would always feel pity for stray cats who were drenched in the rain, but she never took them back.

She hated herself for this.

Just once, she hoped to do something she never ever did.

Part 3

August 31st 6:15 PM

He recalled something that happened a long, long time back.

This person called Accelerator used to have a normal name. 2 Japanese characters for his family name, 3 Japanese characters for his own name. It was a

very Japanese name, a very ordinary name.

He hadn't always been the strongest in Academy City.

At first, everyone thought that he was just stronger than those around him.

However, when it rained, it poured.

And to him, the greatest calamity was that his power was a lot stronger than what he had thought.

The youths of the same age who rushed at him had their bones fractured on a single touch.

The teachers came to stop him, and their bones got broken as well.

The adults came over to surround him, and they were eliminated as well. In the end, Anti-Skill and Judgment, as if they were facing off against a bank robber, launched attack after attack at this boy who was only 10 years old with all sorts of powers and new-age weapons. However, these people were eliminated as well.

And he only felt fear.

Fearing that he would be violently treated, he frantically waved his hands about.

For a 10 year old child, this was a response that was to be expected.

However, it ended up like this.

The unmanned and windowless assault helicopters flew about in the air, and the armored Anti-Skill reinforcements that looked like robots held their ground in order to protect their wounded comrades. It was like a scene in a monster movie shown on the television, except that he was the ugly monster that everyone so feared.

Thus he realized it. His young heart realized it. If he used his fingertip to touch, others will get hurt; if he felt irritated about something, people may die. This commotion would snowball until he ended up fighting against Academy City, the world, and then everything would be destroyed.

In order to prevent 'elimination', he had to seal his 'feelings' in his heart and not show them. Bad emotions were dangerous, and good emotions could bring jealously and bring about attacks.

The way to prevent hurting others was to prevent himself from being moved by anything. If he felt irritated, others may die, so he couldn't let his feelings show. Only when he was like an ice person could he prevent himself from losing control of his powers and endangering others.

But at that moment, the young child made a grave mistake.

It was because his method made him so cold that he became someone 'who doesn't care about whether others are dead or alive', a person who wouldn't grumble no matter how others treated him, a person who seemed uninterested in other people's lives.

Without realizing this mistake, he chose his own path.

Just like that, he barely managed to prevent 'elimination'.

He, who lost interest in others, ended up surrendering fairly easily, resulting in him to be locked in a cell called the special class. However, a gear in a person's heart couldn't be stopped easily. As he continued to waver about without having any determination like a squid, he managed to come up with a solution.

Since he couldn't quarrel with others easily, he should just create an environment where there wouldn't be quarrels.

He just needed to be extremely strong and make others think that fighting with him was a stupid thing to do.

He needed to be not just the 'strongest', but 'invincible'.

Maybe this would prevent others from getting him, and prevent himself from feeling fearful. He would be recognized by others. That was what his weary heart yearned for.

He never realized that such a thought would end up hurting so many people in the days ahead.

“Such stupidity...”

After walking out of the research facility, Accelerator ignored the personality files disk and ran off to the restaurant where he had left Last Order. Though it had been a few hours, he felt that Last Order shouldn't be able to move.

He was running madly on the street.

The fragments of his memory that still remained there stubbornly continued to run.

That was right. He was recognized.

Even though he didn't become 'invincible', even though he was not the 'strongest'.

That girl recognized him.

It was true that this may be too late. Maybe it was too late to want to change anything now. However, he did get recognition. The girl treated him like a human, with a normal, fearless, equal standing attitude.

No matter what, he didn't want to lose a certain feeling in his heart.

And this feeling of not wanting to lose anything delighted him all the more.

It seemed like something was starting to change.

It seemed like something was hoping that it would change.

Even if he knew that it was too late, he didn't care.

Part 4

August 31, 6:32 PM

Accelerator was running on the street.

It took him quite some time to walk from the restaurant to the research facility. And since he had spent quite a while talking to Yoshikawa Kikyou, the sky was now getting darker.

As he was running, Accelerator noticed all the sounds around him. For some reason, there were many Anti-Skill members around. Listening to them closely, it seemed like an intruder had forced his way through Academy City's safety net.

(Is this person related to Amai Ao? If so, did someone 'outside' request him to insert the virus into Last Order? Is that Amai really intending to escape 'outside'?)

Running at a speed faster than an ordinary car, Accelerator continued to think.

(No, if that intruder's aim is to help Amai escape, he shouldn't have created such a large commotion and caused Academy City to be on their guard. So it seems like they're completely unrelated, it's really dangerous to make such a conclusion.)

No matter what the truth was. Right now, it was more important to look for Last Order than to find Amai Ao. As for that intruder, since he didn't know whether he was related, it was better to leave it as it was.

Thinking about this, he saw the restaurant where he had separated from Last Order.

(Damn it, I should have brought that brat over to the research facility!)

The reason why he hadn't done so was because he hadn't known how they would treat Last Order. He had been afraid that she would get 'punished' by the research facility, which was why he had left her at the restaurant. However, he had ended up complicating things. However, it was useless to start cursing now. He didn't know whether Last Order was still in the shop or whether she had been taken out. Accelerator dashed towards the restaurant.

Suddenly, there was a ruckus.

The glass windows of the restaurant shattered in front of him.

“Ah?”

Accelerator inadvertently stopped in his tracks.

This restaurant window was facing the road. On the road, there was a 2m tall and burly man who looks like a sumo wrestler. This burly man, who was dressed in black Western clothes, slowly entered the shop with the glass-shattered window.

There seemed to be an argument in the shop.

After a while, a set of footsteps rang out from within the shop, through the glass-shattered window and onto the road. However, there was just footsteps, and he couldn't see anyone. It was as if he was seeing an invisible man, as the shoe-shaped imprints crushed the glass fragments and let out sounds.

This invisible man ran off in a completely different direction from Accelerator. On the way, he crashed into a black long-haired girl in a miko outfit. The contents of the stuff in that mysterious girl's arms spilled out, and it seemed to be cat food. As the bag was open, the invisible man got cat food scattered all over him.

Just as Accelerator was feeling weird about this person, a boy jumped through the shattered window and onto the road.

A person he was very familiar with.

“It's...it's that guy!”

Accelerator widened his eyes in shock. That boy was the Level 0 who had beat Accelerator down with a punch in order to save the Sisters and force the experiment to be frozen.

The boy dashed down in the direction where the invisible man had gone. However, to a bystander, the boy was running for his life instead of being chased. For some reason, it seemed like the man who was the shop owner and waitresses were chasing him from behind.

(What's going on? That restaurant had such a commotion...is it because of that

brat? Cheh, can't tell at all. That idiot may end up treading into such waters.)

Accelerator hesitated for a while, not knowing whether he should pursue him. He finally choose to walk into the restaurant first. There was not much time left, and he couldn't mess around. Also, with his 'speed', he could still catch up to him after collecting information.

He walked into the restaurant.

The restaurant now looked completely different compared to when he had been there in the afternoon. The windows facing the road were all shattered. A table seemed to have been sliced into pieces as if by a laser and had tumbled onto the floor. Having seen this commotion, the customers in the restaurant didn't seem like they could recover, as they were standing far away from the sliced up table, chattering with each other as if they were watching a small fire.

Accelerator looked around the place.

The shop wasn't big, but he didn't see the familiar figure of Last Order.

(Oi, don't tell me she really got taken away? That brat shouldn't be able to go out on her own in that condition.)

Looking around, he exchanged glances with a waitress. She was a petite girl that did not look much different from a middle schooler. At first, she just stared blankly at Accelerator. Maybe she was so shocked that she forgot that it was business as usual. After about 3 seconds, the girl finally recovered and walked towards Accelerator. The waitress looks rather pale as she smiled.

“Wel, welcome. Is it just one person? No smoking is allowed--”

“I'm not here to eat, I'm here to look for someone. She should still be here.”

“Eh?”

“A ten-year-old brat who's not wearing clothes and has only a light blue dirty towel over her. She came with me to your shop here. Do you have any recollection of her?”

If there was a need to discuss who could leave the biggest impression, there's

nothing that leaves a deeper impression than Last Order's get-up. That was why Accelerator didn't specify much. He thought that it should be enough.

But the petite waitress seemed rather fearful.

“Eh, ah...I'm sorry, I don't remember. Do you remember which table she was sitting at?”

“...Are you kidding me? Is that get-up common in this age?”

The waitress who bowed politely and apologized looked like she was about to cry. It seemed like she really didn't remember.

(Cheh, is it because of this commotion?)

Accelerator muttered. It had been several hours since he was here eating lunch with Last Order, and they just had a huge commotion here, so it was possible to forget about 'a stranger wearing really weird clothes' due to shock.

Having suddenly lost his clue, Accelerator looked impatient. The petite waitress seemed afraid as she frantically hid inside the shop.

(Now what? Should I check the CCTV?)

Normally speaking, this kind of image record should be left to the security company; the shop wouldn't have the original records. But if he had hacking skills, he could retrieve the records from outside...

(Nope, this can't be compared to the outside.)

Accelerator shook his head.

He didn't have any skill in hacking at all. And besides, in Academy City where there were all sorts of research facilities and classified information, it was impossible to leave this to an ordinary security company. Normally speaking, the security system in Academy City should be flawless. Only a very rare breed of exceptional hackers could hack in through 'loopholes' that the starters of the system hadn't even discovered.

Thinking about this, Accelerator saw 2-3 staff workers walking out. That petite

waitress was hiding behind them.

Maybe they think that I'm obstructing them from work, Accelerator thought. However, there was no time to properly explain it to them. Accelerator's eyes let out a dangerous gleam.

But unexpectedly, a 30-year-old male worker revealed a friendly smile and said,

“Are you a relative of that girl with the towel?”

“Ah?”

“That girl who came to our shop at 3 PM didn't seem to be feeling well.”

Accelerator let the male worker's words roll in his mind. At that time, Last Order's incomplete body had caused a malfunction and created multiple fever like symptoms. She shouldn't have be able to go out with her own power.

“Around 4 plus, we saw her lying on the table and felt that something's not right. The waiter tried to talk to her, but found that she lost consciousness. We thought that it was serious, so we called for an ambulance.”

“So that brat's in the hospital now?”

“No. Before the ambulance came, a white-cloaked man came in saying that he's a relative of the girl. He said that the girl's illness occurs periodically, and is not in any danger. So we handed the girl over to him.”

A white-cloaked man.

Accelerator gritted his teeth. Maybe these clues weren't enough to make a conclusion, but...

“If you want to find that girl, why don't you try contacting that man? Do you know who he is?”

“--I can guess that with just a kneecap.”

He said nonchalantly.

There was only one person who fulfilled that condition, Amai Ao. Accelerator

saw him messing around at lunch. Besides, how could that Last Order have any 'relatives'?

Part 5

August 31st 7:02 PM

After Accelerator walked out of the restaurant, he decided to call Yoshikawa with his phone.

“What did you say? Last Order was taken away by Amai?”

“I heard that as well, but I'm not too certain myself. What do you think about this? The virus will activate even if she's left alone, right? Why did that guy take the brat away?”

Dwelling on it more, it was weird that Amai Ao was in Academy City. Since he had hid himself in fear of being suspected, logically speaking, he should have tried to escape out of Academy City. No matter how strong Anti-Skill and Judgment were, they couldn't control the world 'outside'. Their job scope was merely limited to this city.

“On technical skill alone, Amai's a really talented researcher. There should be many organizations 'outside' willing to take the risk and hide him, right?”

“Yeah, I don't know why too. Maybe those are just some simple reasons.”

Both of them remained silent for a while.

The sound of the keyboard being typed on could be heard from the other side of the phone.

After a while, Accelerator asked,

“I heard that Amai took Last Order at around 4. Do you think he's still in Academy City?”

“It's 7 PM now, almost 3 hours have passed. If it were normal circumstances, it'd be hard to tell, but our luck this time seems to be good.”

“Why?”

Accelerator concentrated on the phone. Yoshikawa seemed to be focused on something, as the sound of the keyboard being typed on could be heard.

“Some unknown individual from 'outside' broke through the city's security, and forced his way into the city. Also, there was a huge battle at a fast food restaurant, so the alert level was set to orange this afternoon. It's now at red alert. You should have heard of the 2nd level of alert, right?”

Orange alert meant that 'there may be terrorists who've invaded', while red indicated 'a terrorist has been confirmed to have invaded'. No matter what it was, once the alert was given, Academy City would seal its exits to the outside completely. Even the convenience store owners would be having a headache as they couldn't get their supplies.

If it was at orange alert in the afternoon, Amai, who had taken Last Order at 4 PM wouldn't be able to leave the city. Accelerator didn't know which idiot had invaded the city, but it seemed like he had to thank the guy.

“Since that guy's still in the city, where will he be?”

At this moment, Yoshikawa continued to type on the keyboard.

“It's not easy to find him. However, he should be avoiding the crowds. A grown man with a naked girl wrapped in a towel will be too eyecatching. Right now, Amai Ao definitely won't want to become the center of attention.”

Accelerator thought that this was logical, but there was a problem. Today was August 31st, so most of the students were locked up in their houses finishing their summer vacation homework. The entire city was as empty as a ghost city.

“Can you hack into the security robots or satellite image system? Doesn't the other envelope have the data of the city's security search for Amai Ao's hiding?”

“The mechanical security system isn't as convenient as what they say. Think about it, our numerous 'experiments' were conducted under such strict regulations, right?”

“...”

“So the security system can only be used to track information. I managed to track him through the money flow. Do you know? The paper notes now all have IC chips?”

“Ah, I heard of it. It's said that there were too many colored counterfeit notes, so they installed chips to identify them, right?”

“There's actually another reason for the chips. By recording the personal information of the notes, one can identify his monetary flow.”

Yoshikawa continued to type on the keyboard as she said,

“In this age, if you use a credit card or cash to buy something more than 1,000yen, your personal particulars will get stolen. But on the other hand, if it were that child, who lived an urchin's life and didn't use money at all, it's impossible to track her down.”

“Alright, let me change the question. How did Amai escape in the past?”

“Basically, he drives his car around. It seems like he would park his car at the park or the dump and sleep in the car. But as for showering, food and oil, he needs to use money, so he can't completely hide himself.”

Answered Yoshikawa casually, while continuing to type on the keyboard.

“Doesn't he have some housing facility like a hotel or something? Did he go to a friend's house, before?”

“I suppose he doesn't have anyone that can be considered a friend.”

“...Seems like he's trash like me.”

“When the research center of the Radio Noise project was forced to close down, as it was a private research organization, he got saddled with debt. Like a

chairman of a company that closed down, once he's poor, friends aren't friends any longer.”

'Tch', Accelerator pondered for a while, and then continued,

“He should be unable to leave this city now, right?”

“If he doesn't dare to be questioned, I suppose he won't even escape a school district.”

“Alright, if that's the case--”

Yoshikawa answered in surprise,

“Hold on, that's weird. Amai Ao hasn't returned back there for a while. Normally speaking, he should be thinking about that place first--”

“The first place he thinks of will be the most dangerous place, so he definitely won't dare to go there. But once humans are forced into a tight corner, their way of thinking will become even simpler.”

Accelerator revealed a cunning smile and headed down the road.

The place he was heading to was the place of a certain research center.

The research organization that had developed the Radio Noise project based on the Level 5 Railgun.

Part 6

August 31st 7:27 PM.

A sports car was parked at a certain research facility.

The air-conditioning in the cramped car was blasted to the maximum, but Amai Ao's hands were still sweating.

His sweaty hand was pressing down on his aching stomach.

At first, he had intended to enter the facility. As the building of the abandoned research facility was still left as intended, there were many places to hide the car, and it should be easy to hide from the satellite cameras. But right now, Amai was unable to undo the heavy lock and chain of surrounding the entrance.

The problem was that he couldn't leave this place. Once he moved the car, he may be interrogated. And if he left the car, he would be carrying the basically-naked Last Order around, and it would be even more likely that he would be stopped.

“DAMN IT!”

Amai had made the wrong move, and now he was really regretting it. He should have escaped 'out' of Academy City immediately after Last Order had the virus inserted into her brain. The force opposing Academy City was waiting for him 'outside'. And all he had to do was to follow their instructions and flee overseas. With his expertise on esper development, any country or research facility would have been more than willing to take him in.

But unexpectedly, Last Order had actually escaped after the virus was inserted into her.

At that moment, Amai Ao's 'plan' was ruined.

Last Order's body adjustments were still incomplete, so she couldn't possibly live outside for long. If worst came to worst, Last Order would really die before the virus was activated.

But if that happened, the Sisters all over the world wouldn't be infected by the virus. If that happened, it would mean that the mission had failed. The 'opposing forces' would definitely not forgive that. At that moment, they wouldn't just simply no longer help Amai escape, they may even give the order to kill him.

Amai had to capture and bring Last Order back, and even ironically, he had to protect her life.

But with the current situation, without an incubator with him, he wouldn't be able to fulfill his objective.

For the entire week, Amai had been like an ant in hot water as he went out searching for Last Order. Finally, he managed to find her with that savage Accelerator. It was a good thing that Accelerator had left and he was able to take Last Order away, but he had ended up in this situation.

"..."

Amai Ao turned to look at the front passenger seat.

Last Order, whose body was still undeveloped, was sitting on the seat. She was sweating profusely, and her breathing was weak. One couldn't possibly hear it if they didn't strain their ears.

There were many electrodes stuck on Last Order's face. The wires that extended out from the electrodes were connected to a notepad-sized computer that was placed near her thighs.

The screen was showing Last Order's pulse, temperature, blood pressure, pulse rate and many other values. Those figures and images weren't things that an ordinary person could read, but if someone who understood them were to see them, that person would be shocked. With such values, anyone could stop breathing at any time.

(Why am I so unlucky!? Why at this time...!)

Amai Ao had a reason to escape.

He had been the person in charge of the Radio Noise project. That plan had been based on Tokiwadai's Railgun, but the clones that were created had low level capability, so they couldn't match the Railgun. The plan had been halted, the research center was forced to shut down. Faced with a hefty debt, Amai had managed to meet a savior. It was the Level 6 shift project for Accelerator.

However, even that plan had been nearly terminated completely.

Amai was unable to repay his debts.

There was no other place in Academy City that would keep him. What he had was an overwhelming debt that was enough to buy a submarine. The Radio Noise research group and the Level 6 shift research group weren't different. Both were privatized firms, and had forced him deep into despair. If he wanted to live, he had to abandon his debt and run.

Thus, he had linked up with a mysterious dangerous group. Under such a situation, if he angered them, he would definitely die. Amai Ao wasn't so optimistic that he thought that he could survive being between Academy City and an opposing force.

(Damn it! Damn it! Why must I end up in this situation!)

Amai's hand slammed onto the dashboard of the cramped sports car.

He had finally managed to catch the escaped Last Order today, but unfortunately for him, the alert level went to orange, and then to red, giving him no chance to leave Academy City. And right now, Last Order's condition was a lot worse than he had thought. If this kept up, she could really die before the virus activated.

(Please, I beg of you! Just a little longer! Hang on until the virus activates!)

Amai knew of a few places where he could get Last Order's body adjustments done. But as the alert level had become red, there were checkpoints all over the city. He would be unable to pass through the checkpoints with a naked girl wrapped in a blue towel. Besides, this girl was an artificial clone that didn't have an ID.

He couldn't even pass the next road, let alone get 'out' of Academy City. Right now, Amai Ao could only tremble in the narrow car and leave his fate to the virus which may be unable to activate.

Suddenly, there seemed to be something that flashed across the glass.

“!?”

Amai's eyes instinctively left the dashboard. But it was a crow that was unrelated to Anti-Skill or the researchers. A black crow flew from right to left.

“Ah...”

However, Amai widened his eyes.

There was nobody in front. Looking over, it was an empty street. There shouldn't have been anything that could make Amai feel afraid. From a 3rd person's view, maybe one would think that Amai was seeing an illusion out of fear.

“Ahh...”

But Amai was not looking in front.

He was looking at the rear-view mirror.

On seeing that small mirror that shows the back, Amai's face went pale. His eyeballs continued to move. He was sweating like it was raining, as if there was a layer covering his skin. His fingers continued to tremble.

In the rear view mirror, there was a boy.

The boy was slowly closing in on the yellow sports car, one step at a time.

A corrupted, psychotic, crazy Level 5 esper.

“...UWAAAHH!!”

A strange voice came out from Amai's throat.

In fact, Amai didn't know what Accelerator was doing over here. But no matter what Accelerator was planning, it was dangerous.

Accelerator was closing in on Amai's sports car without hesitation.

Amai stared at Last Order, who was in the passenger seat.

Right now, Last Order was as weak as a snow crystal. He didn't know what Accelerator was trying to do, but if he handed Last Order over to that monster, that wish would be crushed within a second.

He definitely couldn't hand Last Order over to him.

If so, he could only take on that monster.

(The problem is, how?)

He had a pistol in his pocket, but that thing wasn't going to stop that monster. Trying to use a body of flesh to fight that guy was like racing a Lamborghini car or a type-90 Kyu-maru tank in a marathon

If that was the case, he could only run.

Amai gripped onto the car key tightly.

His hand continued to tremble, and even the act of putting the key into the keyhole was tough for him. He grimaced as he couldn't find the keyhole. Chk, the key was finally inserted in.

He twisted the key hard.

The engine roared loudly. As he was too nervous, the brakes failed, and the sports car dashed forward as if it had been kicked in the back.

Part 7

Accelerator saw Amai's car rush away from him. His obviously shocked look was revealing his mysterious smile.

(That brat...is in the car's passenger compartment. I thought she would be in the trunk, but then again, if she dies, Amai would be really bothered by it.)

Accelerator casually thought as he crouched his body slightly.

BOOM! He stamped onto the ground.

Accelerator immediately jumped up about 10m into the air, and easily jumped past Amai's sports car before landing right in front of it. The man in the driver's seat who saw this immediately froze. He frantically turned the steering wheel

around, but it was already too late. The cheap domestic sports car that had its gas pedal floored slammed right into Accelerator.

The sound of the metal being crushed was like 1,000 times the sound of a can being crushed.

But Accelerator hadn't budged at all. Not even a strand of hair was moved. The thing that got crushed was the car, as the force of the sports car was 'directed downwards'. The 4 tires had burst, and the rims were crushed into an oval shape. The height of the chassis was crushed to zero, and the car had dug several centimeters into the ground. Maybe the car body was wrecked too much as the windows on both the left and right sides had cracks in them.

Amai, who was in the driver's seat, revealed a smile.

The sports car got damaged to such an extent, yet he was actually able to remain unharmed even when sitting inside. He may feel that this was unbelievable, as even the safety airbag hadn't popped out. This perfect control of power clearly demonstrated the difference in ability between Accelerator and Amai.

“U,uuuAAHHH, DA, DAMN IT!!!”

Amai cried out as he continued to floor the gas pedal, but the rims of the wheels were already distorted and buried deep into the asphalt. In this situation, the car couldn't possibly move forward. After 10 seconds, Amai finally realized this. He then intended to carry Last Order away, so he started to force the car door open.

“Calm down, you middle-aged guy. Isn't that a little too ugly?”

THOMP! Accelerator stomped down on the bumper lightly. It was unknown how the impact was changed as the driver seat door was quickly shut. This act of shutting the door was like snapping a large trap on some prey. Amai was trapped by the door as he tried to get out. The air in his lungs was forced out, and he slid down onto the floor, unable to move.

“Ah, sorry for using such a crude way to beat you. But at least it's better than giving your life away, right?”

Amai didn't answer, and Accelerator wasn't hoping that he would. He looked at the seat beside the driver's seat. The impact had caused the entire driver's seat to

get distorted, but in contrast, over there the girl was sleeping calmly and soundly.

“You really can make things difficult for others, you damned brat.”

Having the load off his shoulders, Accelerator just said this and pulled out his phone.

“Yoshikawa? Yeah, I got the brat. She's safe.”

There was still more than 4 hours left before the virus activated.

Part 8

August 31 8:03 PM

Accelerator opened the side door of the passenger seat. Wrapped in the towel, Last Order didn't respond at all. Her limbs sunk weakly onto the floor, and were completely stained in uncomfortable sweat.

Just as Accelerator was about to carry Last Order out, he suddenly realized a problem.

“Oi, the brat has some things that look like electrodes. I shouldn't take them off, right?”

“Hm? Can you please describe that clearly?”

On hearing Accelerator's description, Yoshikawa said,

“That should be our equipment for checking the Sisters' conditions. It just shows the respiratory rate, pulse rate, blood pressure, body temperature, physical and mental conditions. It's okay to take the electrodes off.”

A cable linked the electrodes to a notebook computer. There were several images

on the screen. Besides that, there was a percentage display value that had the words 'BC functioning value' beside it.

“What's this?”

Accelerator asked.

“Oh, that's Last Order's brain functioning rate. Brain Cell is called BC for short.”

Accelerator was shocked. It was not easy to monitor a person's brain functioning perfectly. One really couldn't tell that such a small computer had such a large function. However, the Sisters were Electromasters, so maybe they used their abilities to make up for the lack of ability?

Either way, it was not a technology that Accelerator could understand.

“Oi, is there anything that can erase the virus from this brat's brain? It'll take some time to take her back.”

“Impossible. That's just a detection device. If you want to enter it, you have to have an incubator and a Testament.”

“Oh.”

Accelerator pondered for a while, and suddenly realized something.

For some reason, there was noise coming from the other side of the phone.

“Oi, aren't you at the research center?”

“You just realized it? I'm driving over to you now. There's an incubator and a Testament, so that should be much more time efficient than you going back to the research facility. Maybe she will want to run away when she sees me, but with your movement ability, you should be able to stop her from going.”

So you just wait over there. Yoshikawa said.

“Of course, a huge quantum computer won't be able to fit into a car, but a DNA computer can fit it perfectly, so I brought one as well. The function may be a bit inferior, but at such capacity, it should be enough.”

“...Oi, since you can use a machine to analyze, why did you use a red pen to make markings? That's just unnecessary work, right?”

“Machines are extremely dull, or too rigid. Sometimes, they might even create problems. Have you heard of video games? When the games are being debugged, they still need humans to actually play them. We calculate the data through a machine, correct it through human means, put it back into a machine to see if there are any more errors...and we continue to use such a method.”

Accelerator reached his hand out, taking off the last electrode from Last Order's face and randomly asked,

“So you analyzed the code already?”

“About 80%. After I analyze it, I still need to write a code to override the virus, so we don't have much time.”

But I believe that we can make it, Yoshikawa said confidently.

Accelerator frowned slightly, as such a style wasn't like her.. However, this made Accelerator heave a sigh of relief, as the situation seemed like it was all alright now.

(How irritating. How much trouble must you create for me, you damned brat?)

This was the first time Accelerator actually experienced what it felt like to 'wait for someone'. Every second seemed to be dragging on meaninglessly. This feeling couldn't be considered comfortable. He stamped hard onto the asphalt floor lightly, and just like that, it created a crack.

“Mi,saka--”

Suddenly, the girl's mouth moved.

Like a thirsty person asking for water, her lips were trembling.

“Misaka...as, Misaka is---”

Her eyes were shut, and only her lips were moving. The girl was moving crazily as if she was trying to say something. Accelerator didn't know whether he should

listen to her words carefully. Besides, since the expert Yoshikawa hadn't arrived yet, Accelerator didn't know what he could do to ease her pain.

“Misa,ka—as Misaka is Misa! Ka! Misaka as Misaka as Misaka as

“Oi, what's going on!? Is there any emergency function?”

“Calm down. Can you let me listen to what that child's saying?”

“HURRY UP AND EXPL--!”

“HURRY!!”

Yoshikawa started to sound serious, making Accelerator feel that something was wrong. But even if he didn't do anything, Last Order's cries could be heard through the phone.

“hiuashihcvjnxnuinweiniondfnizdNIncion
whsioahjisdisjad8qwyrionjdklnckljiojdosfjljkl;sdjfi0jdsj!!”

The girl's cries weren't of any country's language now.

On hearing the girl's cries through the phone, Yoshikawa was so shocked that she couldn't breathe.

“...I see.”

“WHAT? WHAT'S GOING ON?”

Accelerator was obviously anxious. Yoshikawa answered him clearly,

“This is a virus code that was encrypted. That virus seems like it's about to be activated.”

On hearing this, Accelerator nearly froze.

The virus should be activated at midnight on 00 hour 00 minute 00 second. It was just past 8, and time wise, there should have been 4 hours left...

There was only one possible reason.

That was a fake signal.

The enemy Amai Ao had deliberately installed a fake activation code. The information that the enemy gave out shouldn't have been considered real at all. Accelerator had wondered before why Amai Ao would be so kind as to indicate

the time for the virus to activate.

A simple game like trap, yet so terrifying.

Maybe Amai hadn't expected that this trap would work. Setting this trap up must have been an extra bonus within his capability rather than an insurance.

Accelerator started to wonder what would happen when the virus activated.

“Once the time starts, the virus will start to activate. It will be complete 10 minutes later, and then it will spread through the Misaka Network to all the Sisters and cause the Sisters to go berserk.”

What would happen to the girl in his hands?

The boy recalled.

“I haven't analyzed it completely, so I can't be sure, but if I go by my hypothesis, the symptoms indicate that they will end up attacking any humans without discrimination.”

Accelerator was unable to do anything.

Last Order continued to shout and cry. Numerous warning windows buried the notepad-sized computer screen.

He could barely see the 'BC operation rate' from between the gaps of the windows—which was the brain cell functioning rate.

The values continued to increase. 70%, 83%, 95%...even though the values exceeded 100%, they continued to increase.

That small body of Last Order arched backwards as if electrocuted.

Then, even the 'BC functioning rate' window was blocked by the warning signals.

It was as if Last Order's personality files were overwritten by some mysterious virus.

It seemed like Yoshikawa was trying to say something through the phone, but

Accelerator was not listening.

It was too late.

Yoshikawa hadn't finished analyzing the virus, and hadn't found a way to debug it. Also, there was fake information present in the code she had analyzed. Even if she managed to debug it, she couldn't be certain that she was correct. Besides, it was impossible to ask her to move back to the facility where all the equipment was.

Amai, who had created the virus, should be clear about how it worked, but there was no time to interrogate him and write a code to debug it.

A mysterious feeling etched into Accelerator's mind, but before he could understand what that feeling was, his thoughts were interrupted by Yoshikawa's calm voice.

“Listen to me, Accelerator, it's still too early to sigh now. You still need to do something.”

“...Something? Can we still save her?”

“It will take some time before the virus spreads out. Before that, the current virus will be converted into a 'superior code' that they can't disobey, rather than it appearing there right from the start. This is because if that's the case, the virus code would be obvious in the normal personality files. There's only 10 minutes, I suppose you should be able to guess it, but you can only do one thing—eliminate the girl. Kill the child, and protect this world.”

Yoshikawa's words didn't have any intention of saving Last Order right from the beginning.

What she said as her justification was something higher than that.

Protect the world.

If he wanted to prevent all the Sisters in the world from going berserk, he had to kill this girl personally.

The girl who was struggling and rolling about, unable to make even a cry of

help.

Accelerator mocked himself. His power that could only kill would actually work at this moment. And not even the minimum damage was allowed; he had to kill the girl.

If this dragged on longer, the command code that was input into Last Order's brain would break her. There was only one way to prevent that, and that was to take her life before it happened.

“Damn it.”

No matter what he chose, she wouldn't be saved.

"At least smile to let her rest in peace", Yoshikawa Kikyou said.

“DAAAAAAMMMMMMNNNNNNN IIIITTTTTTTTT!!!”

Accelerator gritted his teeth. There was a sense of sharp pain deep within his chest. This pain was completely different from the time when he was beaten up by the Level 0. This couldn't even be compared. This was the pain of losing. Right now, Accelerator finally experienced it. He finally experienced the weight of the girl in his heart. Accelerator finally experienced this pain he had inflicted 10,000 times on others.

It was too late for him to experience it.

No matter what he did, it was too late now.

Accelerator roared out, but it was useless.

With his power, he wouldn't be able to delete the virus in Last Order's brain. He never had such a useful ability. Though he was said to have the strongest power, it was just the manipulation of 'vectors' like kinetic energy, heat, electricity and all sorts of energy and redirecting them. In application, he could only kill. He had such power, yet he could only think to use it to touch the enemy's skin and reverse the enemy's blood and electrical flow to form an explosion--

(…?)

Thinking till here, an idea suddenly flashed in Accelerator's brain.

He reminisced what he just thought.

Reverse the electrical flow in a human?

(Hold on, what attracts me to that so much?)

That phrase continued to appear in Accelerator's mind.

The time in his body instantly slowed down.

(There's less than 10 minutes left, so I can't call for help. I have a disk and a notepad-sized computer with me here. The disk has the personality files before infection. The Testament is needed. The Level 5 'Accelerator' can manipulate it. It uses electrical flow to control the information in the brain to control the electrical signals. To debug, I have to look through the huge personality files and find a way to find the code and delete it. If I can't find a solution, I have to kill Last Order.)

Accelerator tried to think quickly.

The rows of excessive words were gradually removed, forming meaningful sentences.

While focusing on his thoughts, the short few seconds seemed to become an eternity.

(If I don't want to kill her, I have to delete the virus. I need to do two things. First is to find the virus codes from that massive personality file in Last Order. The second thing is to manipulate the electric signals in Last Order's brain and accurately delete the virus codes.)

In Academy City, where the school curriculum included esper development, the strongest esper in Academy City also had the strongest brain. Having accurately calculated all the air particle flow in the entire city before, Accelerator used all his thoughts to find a way to solve this.

(The disk has the personality files 'before infection'. If I compare it to the one 'after infection' and find the difference—hold on, what attracted my attention

here? Let's recall from those abusive words of mine. What am I able to do best? What can I easily think of?)

Thinking about this, Accelerator's shoulders jerked as if they had been electrocuted.

Human electrical reversal.

If Accelerator's power could redirect any energy 'vector'.

If he could let the blood and electrical flow in a body reverse on contact with the skin.

He looked up. It took a mere 10 seconds to think about this.

“Oi, if I can control the electrical flow in the brain, I should be able to correct that brat's personality file without a Testament, right?”

“What are you--”

Speaking halfway, Yoshikawa seemed to realize something.

The Testament controlled the electrical flow in a human, forcing in personality and knowledge.

“...Are you intending to become a Testament yourself? Impossible, though your power is to redirect any 'vector', controlling a brain signal is unheard of...!”

“Why not? I did use skin contact to reverse the blood and electrical flow in a human body in the 'experiment'. Since I can 'redirect', 'manipulation' shouldn't be hard right?”

Of course, Accelerator had never actually manipulated the brain signals of others before, so he didn't have confidence that it would work.

But this was the only way left. If possible, he hoped to use the Testament. If he could prepare an anti-virus code, it would be perfect. The problem was that the current situation wasn't that perfect. If he didn't want to give up, he could only make use of what he had here to break through the difficulty.

Through his own hands.

It was okay even though it was not perfect, he just needed to save her life.

“That's impossible. Even if you can you use your power to manipulate Last Order's brain, the anti-virus process isn't complete, and you can't even delete it completely.”

“...”

It was true. Yoshikawa still hadn't finished analyzing the virus. And since Yoshikawa hadn't detected the fake parts in the virus, it seemed like the research results wouldn't be completely correct.

“Listen, even I made the decision to kill her. I know the workings of that child better than you by at least 100 times, and even I feel that there's no other way other than to kill her. Do you know what that means?”

Yoshikawa said in an icy voice,

“Your ability alone isn't going to erase the virus from Last Order's brain at all. If you fail, you'll sacrifice 10,000 Sisters. And if the situation gets out of hand, Academy City will be forced into a war with the rest of the world. In order to prevent that, we have to give up on Last Order.”

Yoshikawa sounded like she was lecturing Accelerator, but she was delivering the final ultimatum.

“Of course, it's a different case altogether if you can immediately write an anti-virus code. Can you do that? The virus will activate in a few minutes, can you do that?”

“Of course.”

Accelerator replied without hesitation. Hearing this, Yoshikawa Kikyou nearly stopped breathing.

Accelerator turned his eyes to Last Order, who was lying limp on the passenger seat, and then looked into the envelope. The envelope had a disk that had the label 'serial 20,001 personality info/before infection' on it.

It had the personality files before infection. In other words, if he compared Last Order's brain now to this personality file and found the excess parts, he could erase the virus code. Once that was complete, he just needed to overwrite the corrupted data with the normal one to correct it. It was like using a hammer to smash an uneven metal floor to flatten it.

This act of smashing the protruding virus back in was what they called neutralizing a virus.

“Damn it...of course I can do it. WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK I AM!?”

Yoshikawa seemed to be saying something through the phone, but Accelerator was no longer listening. He wanted to shut the phone off, but the phone slipped and dropped onto the floor. He didn't intend to pick it up at all.

Accelerator smirked.

He already knew the flaw to this method. He had the 'personality data before infection'. In other words, if this personality file was the base, it would 'overwrite most of the excessive information', and all the memory 'after infection' would be cleaned off. It was like painting a new image over a completed painting.

Including that meeting.

Including that conversation.

Including that smile.

Everything would be lost, and he would have to overcome that pain.

“...So what? It's better for that brat to forget about everything.”

Thinking back, that was the case. The walk back down the alley and destruction of his room at midnight were proof that as long as she remained together with Accelerator, she would have the danger of being attacked by unknown people.

Though Last Order wasn't afraid to accept Accelerator, it was all the more reason that he couldn't let such a person exist in the same life as him.

She had to go back.

Back away from this monstrous, bloody and cruel world. Back into the warm and sunny world.

Lonely and weak, he laughed at himself, then inserted the disk into the notepad-sized computer.

A large amount of data appeared in front of him. He quickly scanned through the data that was scrolling at waterfall-like speed, reading all the data. It took him 52 seconds to finish reading, 48 seconds to close his eyes to remember, and 65 seconds to compare what he had memorized to the data on the screen.

The preparations were complete.

He was ready to put an end to this.

Clak. He crushed the notepad-sized computer. The fragments of the girl's internal design fell from his hands.

“...”

He shut off the reflection on his hand, using his fingers to touch the girl's forehead. The girl's skin felt slightly hot, as if she had a cold. He extracted the electrical flow of the human and continued to touch the 'direction' as if he was touching the insides of the girl with his hand. Through the 'direction' of the electrical flow in the person, he managed to grasp it.

Finally, the girl's internal workings were in Accelerator's mind completely.

The girl's thought process that appeared in his brain was ever so warm.

One that made people want to hug, and not lose it.

However,

He had to do this.

“You damned brat. Since I helped out so much, I won't allow you do die by yourself.”

After saying that, he smiled.

If there had been a mirror in front of him, even he himself might have been shocked. It was a gentle smile.

Accelerator's hand was trembling.

Using the power that could only kill to save others was like tying a spoon on a tank cannon barrel to feed a baby weaned food; it was extremely difficult.

“...How interesting. Don't die of shock.”

He said this.

He was inserting the 'power' and changing the 'direction'; the 'war' had begun.

The virus would activate at 8:13 PM. There were still 52 seconds till the final moment.

Part 9

August 31 8:12 PM 08 seconds.

“hjknasdpsjdofjkoxcvkliwenijosdmklmxc'mpml;dsm process 9jpnasidi load 9w..aea path A to w. Red wavelength of process 08 to process 72 is replaced by path C into A8 area D sealing process 56 through S wave blue changed to red...”

The meaningless language that Last Order was uttering was gradually changing into Japanese. Accelerator was sweating. There was a feeling that his brain was being burned. His vision was gradually becoming narrower. As all his calculation ability was gathered on one point, reflection wouldn't work, and the uncomfortable sweat was sticking onto him.

Right now, he was comparing the 'infected' Last Order's personality files with the

one 'before infection'.

The 'difference' between both of them was the virus codes. Though some of it included Last Order's memories of her interactions with Accelerator, Accelerator was unable to tell which were virus codes and which were memories.

The calculation of the amount of data required to be overwritten was complete.

The total was 357,081.

He could only delete all these processes to destroy the virus.

The BC value of Last Order was flashing on the screen, giving off numerous warning windows at a shocking speed.

Part 10

August 31 8:12 PM 14 seconds.

“Turning the process 21 from red to orange and then through path D to A7, C5, F10 split zones area D seal removing and inserting process 32 into special authoritative process 89 till 112, and gather at path A, processes below 113 taken by path G through point D4...”

After understanding all the abnormal 'codes' in Last Order's brain, Accelerator sent a command to all the codes. There was only one line, 'overwrite'.

Zzzzzzz...

He could feel a mass amount of signals moving, and it was a feeling like the tide subsiding.

Last Order's body was bouncing about.

Her fingers were twitching, as if she was being manipulated by some invisible strings.

Accelerator couldn't tell whether they were viruses or memories, as the 'potentially malicious' processes were being deleted one line after another, like words from a black ballpoint pen being removed with white correction fluid. The remaining unrepaired processes totaled 173,542.

The warning windows that were popping up on the notebook screen started appearing less, and less, and less frequently...until finally, there weren't any more windows popping up. The reverse flow then caused all the warning windows to disappear one after another, as if it were a tape put on rewind.

Part 11

August 31, 8:12 PM 34 seconds

“Processes through path K are converted through yellow wavelength as V2, H5, Y0 and split through process 201, process 202 to 205 wavelengths are registered under red paths G and linked to C, D, H, I, split into points F7, R2, Z0...”

I can do it, Accelerator started to feel confident. The virus that was preparing to start up was returning back. If this kept up, he would just barely erase the virus in time.

The codes left totaled 59,802. Thinking of these processes that were about to be erased, Accelerator revealed a lonely smile. Besides the virus, what else was he deleting?

The electrical signal was beating through his hand.

As if it was trying to make the final struggle before it was erased.

The warning screens on the display continued to disappear. The data that was being overwritten was getting faster. The gaps between the windows were becoming wider.

Last Order's forehead continued to shudder and sweat. However, she was not shaking as much now, and it seemed like her body condition was improving.

Part 12

August 31, 8:12 PM 45 seconds

At this moment.

The strange voice of a person reached Accelerator's ears, who was removing the virus. He looked up, and saw that Amai Ao, who had been knocked unconscious by the clamping of the car door, was actually standing there.

If it were just like that, it would be nothing.

But he was pointing a shiny black pistol at him.

“Don't...you dare stop...me....”

With bloodshot eyes, Amai Ao groaned.

The remaining processes left were 23,891. Accelerator still couldn't let off. If the remaining processes caused any errors, Last Order's brain could be wrecked.

There were only a few warning windows on the screen. To Accelerator, it represented Last Order's health status. He couldn't leave any window open.

Part 13

August 31, 8:12 PM 45 seconds

The two of them were only about 4m away from each other. The bullet couldn't possibly miss.

“Ugh!?”

Right now, Accelerator was concentrating all his power on Last Order's brain signal, so he didn't even have time to 'redirect'. If he decided to multitask in his 'redirecting', he wouldn't be able to accurately manipulate the electrical signals that were as fine as the microbits in an electron microscope image, and Last Order's brain would be wrecked.

There were only 7,001 process codes left.

There were only 9 windows.

The assignment wasn't complete, and time gradually started to slow down.

Amai definitely didn't understand what Accelerator was doing now. But to Amai, the fact that this monster called Accelerator was touching Last Order, who mustn't die was enough to make him panic.

“Don't...you stop me!”

Bubbles foamed out of Amai Ao's mouth, and his eyes were bloodshot.

Right now, he seemed to be unable to tell that it was stupid to aim a gun at Accelerator.

But right now, Accelerator didn't have enough power to 'redirect'. In this situation, he was unable to do anything.

Once that little bullet was fired, it would take Accelerator's life away.

Get that hand away from Last Order's head! His basic instincts were telling him.

Restart the reflection! It continued to tell him. It was true that he would definitely be saved. Not even a nuclear missile could scratch him, let alone a pistol.

Part 14

August 31, 8:12 PM 58 seconds

However, he was still unable to take his hand away from Last Order's head.

It was impossible.

There were only 102 processes and one warning window left.

“Don't...sto—GYAAHH!!” Amai Ao screamed, trembling as he held the pistol aimed at Accelerator.

There was no way for him to dodge it.

Accelerator could only remain stunned as he stared at the finger placed on the trigger.

The clear and crisp sound of the gun firing rang out.

Before the sound reached his ears, a strong hammer-like impact hit Accelerator's forehead. The strong force that his head took caused him to arch backwards. His neck let out a terrifying sound. His body was unable to withstand the impact as it floated into the air.

But he still didn't let go.

Nor would he ever let go.

“Error: Break code No.000,001 to No. 357,081 superintendent codes are

terminated due to incorrect processing. Serial no. 20001 will restart as per normal.”

With the last electronic sound, the last warning window disappeared. Hearing the familiar talking sound of that girl, Accelerator understood that he managed to overwrite the dangerous process with that hand of his.

His hand was gradually losing strength. The body that was forced upwards by the power of the bullet impact slowly left the warm girl.

While in mid air, Accelerator stretched his hand out.

But his fingers were unable to touch the girl.

No matter how much he prayed, he wouldn't be able to fulfill any wish.

No matter how much he desperately tried to look, all of it would slip between his fingers.

(Really, to think that up till now, my thinking was still so naive--)

His vision got blurry due to the speed, but there was no chance of recovering before it turned black. He landed hard on the ground as if he had just fell into Hell. His blurry consciousness started to erode, and his thoughts started to spiral into darkness.

(--I actually thought that I could start anew if I just saved someone...)

Part 15

August 31, 8:13 PM

“...Did I get him? Why? Ha, haha, why...why am I still alive?”

Amai Ao was holding onto the semi-automatic pistol that was giving off white smoke, and sank into a daze.

The bullet hit the center of Accelerator's forehead, and he flew back by 1m, his head facing up as he landed on the ground. His forehead was cracked apart and fresh blood oozed out.

For some reason, Accelerator hadn't used reflection. If so, since his head was hit by the military grade 9mm bullet, he couldn't possibly have survived. Also, what Amai had used wasn't any ordinary bullet, but an experimental type from Academy City.

An impact bullet.

This unique bullet was able to use the air resistance on the bullet through the unique 'groove' on the bullet and create a 'shockwave gun'. The 'gun' would follow the bullet from behind and strike it. Creating a 'groove' on the bullet would increase the damage of the bullet by 5 to 10 times. The 'groove' that was created on the lead bullet would melt due to the air resistance. Even if the bullet head was taken by the enemy, they wouldn't be able to understand the trick behind it. It could be said to be killing two birds with one stone. It was the unique bullet they were enthusiastically studying to take on espers if they revolted.

The wound on Accelerator's head was caused by 2 consecutive impacts, once from the bullet and once from the air gun.

“He should be dead now. Ah! Last Order! My virus!”

Amai Ao looked away from the corpse collapsed on the road and turned to look at the girl that had lost consciousness in the passenger seat. It would be over if the virus hadn't activated. He would be the hunted target of both Academy City and the opposing force.

The girl lay weakly in the chair, her lips unable to move.

Her small mouth started to speak,

“Error: Break code No.000,001 to No. 357,081 superintendent codes are terminated due to incorrect processing. Serial no. 20001 will restart as per

normal.”

Amai felt as though all the water in his body spurt out as sweat.

If the virus had activated, Last Order's heart should have automatically stopped and she should have died after she sent out the command to 'use weapons and esper abilities to kill all the humans that got in contact with you' to all the 10,000 Sisters. This was to prevent others from retracting the order.

But Last Order was still alive.

The virus hadn't activated. Amai Ao was clear about what that meant.

Though he knew it, he was still unable to accept it.

2 steps, 3 steps, Amai staggered backwards.

“Ha,ah,haha, uha...ha, AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!”

Amai Ao cried out in despair, raising the pistol at the person who made his own life a living hell.

The girl who was asleep in the passenger seat.

Amai pointed the pistol at her slightly beating chest as his finger was placed on her chest. Once this finger pulled back slightly, the unique bullet impact head would break that petite body into pieces. He didn't care where he would fire or how many bullets would he shoot, he just wanted to use up all the bullets. Thus, he squeezed the trigger.

The explosion of the pistol could be heard.

But the bullet didn't pierce through the girl.

“--Do you think I'll let you do that? You damned bastard!?”

The corpse climbed up again.

Fresh blood continued to pour out from the wound on his forehead. The boy reached his hand out and blocked the barrel of Amai's pistol. The bullet that had been 'redirected' accurately flew back into the pistol, causing it to explode from

within. The hand that was holding onto the pistol was wrecked.

(Damn it! Wasn't he hit by the special bullet? Why is he still alive?)

The 'impact bullet head' was a modern weapon that used the special grooves carved onto the bullet and air resistance, creating a shockwave gun. Nobody that got hit directly in the head by that bullet would be able to survive.

But Amai made a mistake.

As this unique bullet converted the air resistance into a shockwave gun, the bullet speed would be burned by the air resistance, so the bullet would move forward like an open parachute.

The shockwave that was created followed the bullet, but it would be slightly slower. Though it was just a marginal error of 0.4 seconds, Accelerator had managed to finish the final treatment on Last Order and restart his reflection at the last second.

Although the bullet with depleted speed managed to hit Accelerator on the head, he had blocked the remaining fatal impact.

But Amai Ao didn't know about that. The scene in front of him was like a nightmare.

Amai's remaining working hand, the left one, pulled out another pistol. However, he had never trained to hold a pistol with the weaker left hand, let alone shoot with it. He couldn't even prevent the weight of the pistol from causing him to tremble. Besides, Accelerator was a monster who had still managed to stand up even with a bullet in his head, so it was normal for his left hand to be trembling.

Accelerator was standing in front of Amai Ao.

He seemed to be protecting the delicate Last Order behind him, not caring about the blood that flowed down his forehead, not caring about his trembling legs, not caring that his eyes couldn't see the target clearly.

He just glared at Amai's gun.

Seeing Accelerator like this, the researcher in a white lab coat laughed.

Knowing that he was at a disadvantage, he still laughed as he gave up hope.

“Ha! What are you know? Can someone like you actually change something?”

“...I know. It's really stupid for scum like me to save others. I'm too naïve that even I think that it's funny.”

If he saved others, he might be saved.

At first glance, it was a noble idea, but basically, it was just a thought that was thought just for himself. Those that used others' lives for their own benefit couldn't be called kind people. Such people had no right to be saved.

Basically, this world was full of people that were a lost cause. The naïve yet unkind Yoshikawa Kikyou, the man who had shot at the people who protected him without hesitation, Amai Ao, and the person who insisted that human life was precious after killing 10,000 people, Accelerator.

The people who lived on this corrupted world still wanted to ask for help from others, and that was unforgivable. Those who tried to save others were the dumber lot in the world.

Accelerator understood this clearly.

It was because he was a person of this world that he could understand it.

“However,”

He said this as if he was trying to deny everything.

“This kid here is innocent.”

Accelerator smiled.

Fresh blood continued to gush out of the wound on his forehead, but he still smiled and said

“Even if we're the worst scum, trash that has no right to ask others for help--”

Some of the blood seeped into Accelerator's left eye.

His vision was becoming red.

Even so, he exerted all his strength into his legs that could buckle at any moment.

“But that's still no reason not to save this brat, right? DOES IT MEAN THAT WE CAN TRAMPLE ON WHAT THIS BRAT HAS JUST BECAUSE WE'RE SCUM!?”

His vision bloodied, Accelerator shouted.

He knew that it was hypocritical of himself, and how thick-skinned it was. Every word he had said could be used right back at him.

But he still shouted.

Did it mean that those without the right to save shouldn't save others?

Should the hand of a girl that was extended out be scoffed away?

What did the girl do?

What did she do to be rejected just like that?

“Damn it, isn't...that simple?”

He muttered, seemingly to himself.

Last Order had to be saved. Unlike Accelerator and Amai, she still had a chance to be saved.

It didn't matter who saved her.

That wasn't the problem. Someone had to give a helping hand to her, no matter who it was, or she would really die. It was just that simple.

Accelerator could roughly understand it. He could roughly understand the Level

0's feelings when he had gone in to stop that 'experiment'. No reason, no aim, he just stepped up to save the injured Sisters. On first glance, that person seemed to be a natural hero, one who lived in a world different from him, but this wasn't the case.

There was no such thing as a lead character in this world, there weren't those heroes who were conveniently available for use. Nobody could get help by shutting their mouths, and they may not get help even if they asked for it.

But if one didn't want to lose something important, not because of such a laughable reason that 'nobody helped even after we waited for so long', that person had to be the hero.

No matter how forced that was, how overconfident and how shameless he was,

He had to use his own hands to protect the things most precious to him.

The world was merciless; there weren't naturally born heroes.

So the bystanders had to step up,

And put up a performance worthy of a hero.

“THAT'S RIGHT, I KILLED OVER 10,000 OF THE SISTERS, BUT THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT I SHOULD JUST LEAVE THE REMAINING 10,000 TO DIE. I KNOW THAT THESE WORDS ARE HYPOCRITICAL, I KNOW THAT I HAVE NO RIGHT TO SAY SUCH WORDS, BUT NO MATTER HOW MUCH OF A SCUMBAG WE ARE, NO MATTER HOW MANY EXCUSES WE PUT FORWARD, THOSE CAN'T BE THE REASONS TO KILL THIS BRAT!!!"

Accelerator's legs buckled.

The blood continued to ooze out of his wound.

But he couldn't collapse now.

Definitely not.

“...Gy...AAHHH!!”

Accelerator crouched his body down and jumped at the speed of a bullet at Amai. It seemed like Accelerator had an overwhelming advantage, but the one in danger was himself. He definitely couldn't let the battle drag on. If he didn't end it in one hit, Accelerator would lose consciousness. And also, even though he knew that he had to settle it quickly, he didn't have enough power to use stronger attacks. It couldn't be helped; Accelerator could only choose the simplest way of attack, and that was to close in to the shortest distance.

Amai seemed to know this, as he decided to only defend and not attack. Facing Accelerator, who jumped forward at the speed of a cannon, he knew that he would be caught if he backtracked. With this in mind, he jumped sideways. At that moment, the devil's claw glided past where he had been.

Accelerator turned his eyes to the left.

No, he tried to move over, but his legs buckled and lost balance. Accelerator tried to stand firm, but his legs weren't obeying. The pain of the wound on his forehead suddenly got worse, and the next moment, he lost all sense of pain. He heard the sound of collapsing, and at that moment, he realized that he was on the ground.

The horizontal world of vision showed a girl's figure. The girl that he had tried so hard to protect.

He seemed to be thinking about something, but his consciousness was swallowed by the vast darkness.

Part 16

August 31, 8:38 PM

For quite some time, Amai Ao couldn't believe that he was still alive.

He stared at Accelerator, who had been collapsed on the street for a long time, before stretching his hand out to wipe the sweat off his forehead.

(I'm, still alive...haha, I actually survived...)

He laughed weakly, and then prodded the collapsed Accelerator's head with his finger.

(...There's no reflection. Though it's really inappropriate to kill this monster personally, if I let him stand up again, I won't be able to escape next time.)

Amai Ao aimed the pistol at Accelerator's head.

BAM! The crisp gunshot sound could be heard. The killing sound didn't sound much different from a pop being pulled.

“...”

Amai Ao frowned.

The gunshot hadn't come from his pistol.

Amai felt a sizzling hot feeling from his waist that seemed like someone had opened a hole and poured molten lead into it. He could only turn around slowly, because he was unable to do anything else.

Slightly further away was a used antique car. It was so old that one may have questioned the owner's taste as it opened. A woman in a white lab coat got out. The woman was holding onto a pistol that was not much different from a toy, as it could only hold 2 bullets.

The pistol in the woman's hand was smoking.

“Yoshikawa...Kikyou.”

Amai squeezed out his voice with all his strength. The lab coat wearing woman didn't respond.

Part 17

August 31 8:53 PM.

Amai collapsed onto the ground.

He shook his head to recover his vision that was flickering out all of a sudden, before finally recovering. It seemed like he had passed out, but Amai didn't know how long he had been passed out for, a few seconds, a few minutes or many minutes.

A woman in a white lab coat was standing in front of him.

Yoshikawa Kikyou.

Her back was facing Amai as her antique car's trunk was open. She seemed to be operating on some machine. There was a device in the car that Amai was extremely familiar with. It was an incubator.

(Ugh...)

Amai twisted his trembling neck and turned to look at his own car. Last Order, who had been in the passenger seat, was long gone. It seemed like she had been placed in the cylindrical incubator, but his view was blocked by Yoshikawa who was working, so Amai couldn't tell.

He tried to stand up, but his body couldn't follow what he wanted. He tried raising the Italian military pistol with a trembling hand.

At that moment, Yoshikawa turned around.

The work seemed to be over as she closed the trunk, and aimed her pistol at Amai. Yoshikawa seemed to be smiling, as she raised her pistol and slowly walked towards Amai.

"I'm sorry, it seems like I'm too naive. Not kind, but naive. I didn't have the guts to shoot at your vitals, but I didn't dare to let you escape. I ended up increasing your pain. Perhaps this naive method was the most cruel choice."

"How did you, find me here...?"

"The GPS function of the cell phone. It's quite the old technology, isn't it? Haven't you realized it? That child's phone is still on the line."

Yoshikawa stared at Accelerator with a motherly look and said,

"I could roughly hear what happened around here through the phone. But at least there's no commotion 'outside'."

Amai's hand was trembling even more. The numbness spread to his fingers as if he had buried his hand in snow for a long time. The finger that was on the trigger continued to tremble, and the metal parts of the pistol could be heard rattling against each other lightly.

"Ah, don't worry about that child. I know of a doctor who's really good. Though that doctor looks like a frog and doesn't look to be really amazing, but he has the nickname 'Heaven Canceller', and I believe that he can cure that child."

The sound of an ambulance from afar was becoming closer. Maybe she had called for an ambulance before she shot, and even designated the hospital.

Yoshikawa looked at the pistol that could fire at anytime, not stopping as she walked forward.

It seemed like she practically ignored her own safety.

She had come there to protect these children. Ever since the 'experiment' had failed, everyone wanted to push the responsibility to others, but she seemed to have forgotten about protecting herself. Facing the pistol that could fire at anytime, she didn't feel fear at all. She had only one goal, and that was to return the children that were involved in the 'experiment' to the world they should be in.

Was it really just being naive? Couldn't this be considered kindness?

"...Why?"

Amai squeezed his voice out,

"I don't understand. This isn't like you. You can't possibly do this. You always measure up the probability of chance and risks. Is the chance presented by this act enough to topple that balance in your heart?"

"If I have to answer, I'll say that I hate to use this method of thought. I don't want to see myself succeed like this. But ever since I was little, I've had a wish. Even if it's just once, I just wanted to do something really kind and not just naive."

Yoshikawa Kikyou gave a lonely smile as she walked forward.

Both of them were less than 3m apart from each other.

"Actually, I never wanted to be a researcher."

Yoshikawa added on, mocking herself,

"Unbelievable, isn't it?"

Hearing this, Amai Ao was extremely surprised, for he knew that Yoshikawa was really talented.

"I wanted to be a school teacher. But I didn't want to have that kind of inflexible position of being a lecturer or a professor. I wanted to remember every single student's face, and for every student to come to me if they had any problems. I wanted to run around for a student, not asking for any favors in return. To always smile and act strong, yet cry out loud during a graduation ceremony and get ridiculed by my students. I just wanted to be a kind teacher. Of course, I understand that someone naive yet unkind like me has no right to teach others anything, so I've already given up on that."

Yoshikawa smiled.

Both of them were only 1m away. At that moment, Yoshikawa knelt on one leg. She wanted to make herself reach Amai's level, who was sitting down on the ground, making sure that their eyes were at the same height, as if she was talking to a child.

"However, I thought, I won't be able to give it up completely. Just once, I want to do something really kind, and not just naive. Like a teacher, I want to run about for a child."

Yoshikawa said firmly,

"That's simply it."

Both of their pistols were pressed at each other's chest.

Actually, she knew that Accelerator was unable to return to the ordinary world. The fact that he had killed 10,000 Sisters remained, and that may not have been all there was to it. Although he had tremendous power, the wielder of that power had an unstable heart. If he was not careful, he could end up causing much more damage to humanity.

But Yoshikawa Kikyou still earnestly prayed.

The strongest esper whose real name no one remembered bet his own life to save a girl, and was even willing to take a bullet to the head. The boy knew that he wouldn't be able to live together with that girl, knowing that that girl who was living under the sunlight wouldn't have any reason to be with him, but he never gave up. No matter what, the boy wouldn't give the girl up. Until the end, the boy chose the kind option, and not to protect himself.

He knew that it was too late, but the boy had finally realized that he could have a choice.

The boy understood the significance of protecting others with his own hands.

Yoshikawa wanted to protect that kindness in the boy's heart.

Yoshikawa was unable to accept that the results of that kind action would be such a cruel ending.

"It's over, Amai Ao."

The two people put their fingers on the triggers of the pistols that were pressed onto each other's chest.

"You should be afraid of dying alone. If you want to drag someone down, bring me along. No matter what, I won't allow you to do anything to those children. This is my once in a lifetime request of kindness."

"Humph."

Amai chuckled.

Since Academy City and the opposing force wouldn't accept him, he had no hope for the future.

"It seems like 'kindness' doesn't fit you."

He happily muttered. The force of their fingers were exerted on the triggers.

"Right now, you can be called 'strong'."

The two shots hit each other's chest.

The bullets pierced through their bodies and flew out from Amai and Yoshikawa's backs.

August 31 8:57 PM.

END

Chapter 4: A Certain Freeloading Forbidden Index. *Arrow_Made_of_AZUSA.*

Part 1

August 31, 3:15 PM.

Academy City.

The esper development city that was developed in Western Tokyo. It took up one third the size of Tokyo, and had a population of 2.3 million people. 80% of the residents were students. The 'powers' of the students could be classified into 6 levels, from Level 0 to Level 5.

In this city, the 'powers' weren't some abnormal spiritual power or anything. The 'powers' here had a scientific basis, and after a certain level of training, anyone could obtain one.

In a corner of this extremely conspicuous city, there was a student dormitory. The ordinary High School student Kamijou Touma was staying in this student dormitory, surrounded by summer vacation homework and grasping his head alone in agony.

“SAVE ME! DAMN IT! WHAT IS THIS FACTORIZATION ABOUT!? A MATH PROBLEM HAS 2 ANSWERS!? WHAT NONSENSE!?”

Kamijou cried out in agony as he bent his body back as if he was trying to escape from the math problems on the short glass table. He was a weirdo who would start to mutter to himself once he met difficulty. But even if he managed to deal with the 'mathematics', there was the book review assignment of 'modern Japanese' and 'English assignments' waiting for him, which caused Kamijou's

mind to almost sink into distress.

(Uu...)

Kamijou lay on the floor and stared at his own right hand.

The Imagine Breaker—the power that was hidden in Kamijou's right hand. Any 'supernatural power', no matter whether it was an electrical shot of 1 billion volts or flames more than 3,000 degrees Celsius would be erased by his right hand and vanish without a trace. But such a great ability wasn't of any use in completing a summer assignment.

Right now, it was August 31, 3:15 PM 00 seconds.

This is a disaster...Kamijou said half-seriously with tears in his heart.

It could only be said that when it rains, it pours. He had gone out this morning to the convenience store to buy canned coffee, only to find out that they were sold out. And then he had been held up by Aogami Pierce and Tsuchimikado, and then he was forced by Mikoto to act as her lover, and then he was attacked and chased all over the city by that Aztec magician, who was disguised as Unabara Mitsuki. He hadn't made any progress in his homework at all.

As he turned around to look, he could see a girl who was staring intently at the television and a stupid cat who was burying itself into the bag of potato chips and wolfing the food in large gulps. Both of them seemed to be mocking him.

The girl's name was Index.

It was an abbreviation of the ridiculously long name 'Index Librorum Prohibitorum'.

The girl had white skin, silver hair, green eyes and foreigner's features; and she was also wearing a really glamorous white nun's habit that had gold embroidery on it, making it look like a teacup. She was completely in a 19th century Victorian atmosphere. Actually, he didn't know what a Victorian style was, he just randomly said it.

One could tell from her appearance that she was not a resident of Academy City, the leader of the science world.

And her position right now was of the complete opposite; she was of the magical world that was full of mystics.

She was a little different from a magical girl one would commonly think of, but that was not the only troublesome thing. It was because she was the only person in the world who had obtained all forms of magical knowledge in the entire world through 'a certain method'.

The authentic magical girl was now staring at the television and nodding her head away.

On a side note, what was on the television was a magical girl cartoon that was airing (summer vacation rerun).

少女
ロナミシ

“I see, so this Magical Powered Kanamin normally dresses like a student. No wonder even the Albigensian Crusaders of the Roman Catholic Church couldn't even get a trace of her. But what's that staff that gives out rainbow light...ah! It must be a wand that's the 5th cursed tool 'Lotus Wand' that includes the 5 elements and remade with modern materials! Ohh, as expected of Japan! Such impressive Japanese magic.”

You're wrong, that's just the mental food of otakus that Japan is so proud of. Kamijou wanted to say something to the magical girl (the authentic one) who was staring at the television intently, but he thought that he should ignore it. Right now, he should focus on his homework.

“I say, I won't stop you from watching the television or talking, but you should at least lower the volume of the TV and speak softer! Right now, a tiny distraction for me is fatal enough!”

“What!”

Index unhappily turned her head back and said,

“It's because Touma won't play with me that I could only watch the TV. And where did you go at noon? What was that phone call about? Don't tell me that Touma's acting like usual and went to fight with a magician secretly without telling me?”

“Ah, no, don't worry don't worry, there wasn't any fight this time. We settled it through diplomatic means. Hm, the Aztecs really have a gentlemanly attitude.”

“Then which unfortunate girl did Touma help this time?”

“Stop entering your own world! Since when did this 'I fight...save an unfortunate girl' formula appear?”

Kamijou shouted, only to see Index looking extremely tired and sighing.

“Oh well, no point talking about the past. But Touma, I was neglected for an entire morning, so I could only enter the TV world to escape from reality.”

“Alright, then let's play the holiday homework game. I'll take math, you'll take

English.”

“..I don't want to play such a stupid game.”

Index sighed again and said,

“Oh yeah, Touma, thank you for your manga. I placed the ones I borrowed over there.”

“There—OI!”

Kamijou was speechless. The manga that should have been placed on the bookshelf were scattered all over the floor as if they had met an earthquake.

“Wh-why!? Why did you find more things for me to do in this situation!? Since you took them to read, you should put them back into their places, right?”

“Don't worry, I remember where to put each book.”

Index casually said as she continued to watch the television.

Kamijou lowered his shoulders and sighed. The environment of the entire place was really to let one see 'where the items are'. To someone who could remember 'where the things should be put' flawlessly, it was meaningless to put the manga back in order.

Index was a library of magician books; 103,000 magical grimoires from all over the world like 'The Golden Bough', The 'Book of M', the 'Book of Hermes', the 'Secret Teachings' and the 'Tetrabiblos' were memorized in her brain. To her, even if the room was messed up, she could instantly remember the location of every single book.

“But is this the attitude you should show after borrowing from others?”

“Eh? But it's easier to look for stuff like this.”

Index didn't look happy as she said,

“Besides, Touma, you don't consider where you should put your stuff when you arrange your room, so that's why you can't find your ball-point pen so often. If

you don't believe me, let me ask you, Touma, where's your Ancient Literature assignment?”

“Eh?”

Kamijou sat up and looked on the glass table.

It was not that.

The large stack of Ancient Literature assignment that he had finally finished and stapled had disappeared.

“Ah? Wait a minute! Where did that Ancient Literature assignment I just finished go to?”

“In this situation, the stuff will appear in unexpected places.”

“STOP STANDING AROUND WITH A GENTLE SMILE WHILE WATCHING THE SHOW! PLEASE HELP ME LOOK FOR IT!”

Kamijou's cry of agony rang throughout the student dormitory.

Logically speaking, it should have been in the room. But for some reason, Kamijou had a feeling that he wouldn't be reunited with his Ancient Literature assignment.

Part 2

August 31, 4:00 PM.

There was almost nobody on the streets on August 31.

As 80% of the population were students, and today was the last day of summer vacation, most of the residents were in their dormitories, frantically trying to

finish the summer vacation assignments that they hadn't completed. Only the wind turbines, that had replaced the electric cables, were spinning in a lonely manner.

A man was silently walking on this hot summer empty street.

This man who was standing on the empty street didn't look normal.

In the hot late August under the blazing sun, the man was wearing a black Western suit, and even his tie was black. The man was rather burly, and his thick muscles were still obvious even when they were under a shirt. In such hot weather, he was not sweating at all, keeping his eyes closed as if it was cool.

He looked like some yakuza member or someone who had just attended a yakuza funeral.

However, the burly man had something on his right wrist that was unrelated to a yakuza funeral. A Japanese-style armor that had a black Japanese bow on it that looked like an Arbalest. Through that complicated design, he could pull the bow with one hand and shoot the arrow.

The mysterious man's name was Yamisaka Ouma.

He was not bound by the rules of Science. In other words, he was a magician.

“Index Librorum Prohibitorum.”

The burly man said a string of Latin fluently. It was a name any magician would have heard of. The girl who had 103,000 magical grimoires in her head. Any magician knew that by obtaining such knowledge, they could change the rules of the world and fulfill every single wish.

Thus, there were magicians all over the world who wanted that girl for themselves.

“Hm, still far away.”

Yamisaka muttered to himself, not hesitating as he walked on.

He had quite the battle just to enter this city. Not only was Academy City

surrounded by walls, but there were also Anti-Skill members who specialized in preventing intruders from entering.

Yamisaka hadn't killed those Anti-Skill members, but the wounded Anti-Skill members could suffer from some after-effects. He understood this clearly, but he never stopped in his tracks. Since he had come this far, if he gave up now, it would be too rude to the people he had hurt. Since he wanted to do this, he had to make sure he finished it.

Yamisaka Ouma continued to walk down the street with heat waves all over it.

He had only one aim, a certain room of a certain student dormitory.

Part 3

August 31, 5:05 PM.

Just when it was about time for dinner, they finally found the missing Ancient Literature homework.

Index, who found it, laughed and said,

“Ohhoho, to think that it was hidden in the pile of manga. Aren't I great, Touma? Shouldn't you be saying something to me?”

“DIDN'T YOU MESS UP THOSE MANGA? MESSING THEM UP IS STILL A BAD THING! ARRANGE THAT PILE OF MANGA ONTO THE BOOKSHELF! AND THEN APOLOGIZE TO ME!”

“It had nothing to do with manga. Sphinx took it away.”

On a side note, Sphinx was a calico cat Kamijou was raising. Of course, it was not the mysterious beast that would kill people who couldn't think fast.

As for the culprit cat, it was attracted by a 3-minute cooking show on the television, and was pawing at the television.

Kamijou sighed seriously.

Right now, it was about 5 PM. There was less than 7 hours before the date changed. Even if he rushed through an all-nighter, there was less than 15 hours left till school started. Could he really finish all the math questions, English assignment and Modern Literature?

It was really a waste to spend so much time looking for the Ancient Literature assignment, Kamijou thought in despair.

But on the other side, Index, who couldn't get Kamijou's praise, seemed to be unhappy as well.

“Touma, Touma! I helped out, so I should be able to get a reward, right? I want to eat delicious stuff! Make what they're cooking for today's dinner!”

“...”

Kamijou stared silently at the television.

Maybe it was because it was summer vacation, the 3-minute cooking show was introducing how to make a tofu hamburger to make children happy.

Kamijou then slowly turned his neck around and stared at Index.

His lips made a mysterious smile.

“...Are you complaining of having such a long life?”

“Why are you so rash? Touma, you should be hungry, which is why you're getting angry so easily. Don't you want to eat that?”

“Of course I want to, but haven't I been emphasizing it for so long, that I don't have time to do that?”

“Your brain will become rigid if you give yourself too much pressure. You should occasionally rest once in a while.”

“Uuu! Those completely kind words are making me hate my itchy mouth...”

“Okay okay, Touma, stop grasping your head and wailing about. Eh? Where did your maths problems go off to?”

“Eh?”

Touma stared at the short glass table.

It wasn't there.

Part 4

August 31, 5:30 PM.

Yamisaka Ouma was standing in front of the student dormitory and he looked up at the 7th level. However, his eyes were tightly shut, so one might wonder what significance this action had.

“It's here.”

After Yamisaka muttered to himself, he activated the mechanism of the armor on his right hand. The bow on the armor was activated through the automatic mechanism. But this black Japanese-styled bow had no arrow.

“Fuuma no Gen.”

Yamisaka let go of the bow string without any hesitation. With a ripping sound, the sharp sound of the thin string being snapped echoed throughout the silence so clearly that one might have been shocked.

BOOM! A ferocious roar of wind whipped up beside Yamisaka.

A large mass of air formed up in the size of a beach ball in front of him, but it

was transparent and colorless, so the naked eye couldn't see it.

Yamisaka jumped up on both legs and landed on the mass of air.

Chi! His legs effortlessly crushed the mass of air, flattening it.

BAM! With the loud sound of the air expanding, Yamisaka's body jumped up with shocking momentum.

His body flew up vertically, scaling several meters of the student dormitory wall.

Once he reached the targeted level—Kamijou Touma's room on the 7th level, he grabbed onto the parapet of the balcony to prevent himself from flying further up. He then stood on the parapet and pulled his bow.

“Shouda no Gen.”

BOOM!

With the sound of the bow string being plucked, a transparent metal-like ball smashed the thin glass windows to smithereens.

The scattering of the broken glass sounded like some high-pitched scream.

The numerous pieces of glass scattered into the room like a torrent. Someone may have ended up severely hurt if the person had stood near the window, but Yamisaka didn't care about that. He stepped into the room, preparing to take Index away.

However,

“No one's here?”

Yamisaka was shocked that no one was in the room. In order to confirm that, he checked the bathroom as well, but there was really no one around. It seemed like they had just gone out.

Yamisaka tilted his head, and looked dejected as he walked back to the balcony. The shattered glass windows were scattered everywhere, but the magician didn't care at all about that.

“Hm.”

Yamisaka awkwardly scratched his head, and then muttered,

“Souma no Gen.”

The string resonated like a sonar. The soft sound of the string gradually became louder as it swept through the entire city, giving Yamisaka Index's current location.

Part 5

August 31, 6:00 PM.

“...I have a bad feeling about this.”

Kamijou Touma muttered to himself in the air-conditioned fast food chain restaurant. What was with this chill? Kamijou was extremely puzzled by it. He had locked the door, so there shouldn't have been thieves about...

Even though it was the 31st of August today, a lot of people were still coming out to the streets to eat. The fighters were in convenience stores, fast food restaurants and yakiniku restaurants, resting and preparing for war. They intended to finish their food before returning back to their study tables and continuing their long fights with their summer vacation homework. There was less than 6 hours before summer vacation ended.

“Touma, Touma! Can I choose anything? Can I choose anything from here?”

Index was sitting opposite Kamijou, looking at the extremely large menu. Her eyes were glowing like a child waiting for Santa Claus. On a side note, this restaurant chain had a shocking rule in that it allowed customers to bring their pets in, so the stupid cat was cuddled up on Index's lap.

Kamijou sighed.

Kamijou had merely come to this restaurant with the intention of improving his mood (and save time on cooking). In other words, he intended to sit there and finish the summer vacation homework he hadn't completed—but it seemed like the girl in front of him didn't understand his feelings.

Kamijou stared at the writing pad he had bought from the convenience store, and shook his head. He had originally intended to settle his Literature homework in one go, but it seemed like things weren't looking so good.

“Touma! Touma, Touma! Can I choose anything?”

“What do you want?”

“Then I'm ordering! The most expensive one!”

“...”

Kamijou smiled and said,

“I understand. 2,000 yen worth of raw eggs?”

“TOUMA—!”

The girl cried out in protest.

In the end, Kamijou ordered coffee, Index ordered Set Meal A, and the stupid Cat ordered 'Cat Special Meal C'. The most terrifying thing about this shop that allowed pets in was that they actually provided food for pets. There were also Dog Special Meals and Tortoise Special Meals.

It would take some time for the food to be served. Kamijou took out his writing pad and mechanical pencil and started to write his Book Review.

However...

“Touma, Touma, what Book Review are you writing?”

“I'm writing about 'Momotarou' this year.”

“...Eh...”

“Hold on you foreign girl, you don't understand anything about Momotarou, right? Momotarou's a famous worldwide fairy tale that Japan is so proud of! It's most suited for writing a Book Review during a summer vacation!”

“Really, Touma, it seems like you really hate to read books.”

“It's even more normal than having to memorize every single word of 103,000 books.”

Index's temple trembled.

Then, she revealed a sweet smile that seemed like cheese just melted and said,

“Touma, Touma.”

“What?”

“Have you heard of the truth behind the Japanese fairy tales?”

“Please don't start on it! I'm just writing about a Momotarou book review! If I write some messed-up report, the Momotarou book review won't be a Momotarou book review! And how did you know about the dark truth behind Momotarou?”

“Sigh, you're too naïve, Touma. 'Momotarou' is a real magic grimoire. The original is kept among the 103,000 magical grimoires.”

“What?”

“In Japanese culture, many ordinary lullabies or fairy tales are magic grimoires that are camouflaged. For example, in the story Momotarou, there's actually no such person as 'Momotarou who was born from a peach'.”

“Eh...”

Kamijou's mind went blank. This was bad, Index was in explanation mode, but he couldn't waste any time if he wanted to complete his homework.

“Ever since long ago, the river has been treated as the boundary between Life

and Death. Floating on the river or crossing it indicates that one controls the power of Life and Death. Touma, If you can think of the boat that sends the dead through the River Styx, you can understand this.”

“Sorry, sorry! Time out, time out!”

“The correct interpretation of the story is that the peach that flowed down the River is a forbidden fruit that lets people surpasses Life and Death. In Eastern culture, there is mention of a fruit of Immortality. Of course, it's the peach that the Queen Mother is protecting. The original Momotarou wasn't 'born out of the peach', but the grandpa and granny ate the fruit and became young. One can tell from this that this story is about the creation of an elixir of Immortality...”

“Stop! Stop! End of the out-of-point magic theatre! Please look forward to Index-sensei's lesson next time! Please let me finish my homework, will you?”

Index gave an unhappy 'humph', but Kamijou didn't care as he picked up the mechanical pencil and started to write. The writing of the essay was a lot slower than what he had expected. It seemed like writing this sort of thing wasn't any different from writing a letter of reflection. Kamijou thought as he had barely managed to write three pieces of paper.

“Ho...”

After working so hard, Kamijou relaxed and exhaled.

At this moment, as if it was pre-meditated, the waitress walked over and served the food.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Here's the coffee, Set Meal A and Cat Special meal C.”

“Oh, it's finally here.”

Kamijou moved to clear up the writing paper off the table.

Suddenly, the waitress tripped without warning.

“Ah...”

Shocked, Kamijou could only watch as the tray of food landed on the table. The pile of food formed a hill on it.

The hamburger steak that was the recommendation of the day was separated from the mini hot metal plate, and the metal plate landed directly on Kamijou's thigh. Kamijou jumped up to let the metal plate drop, looking half-serious as he stared at the culprit, looking like he was about to cry.

The waitress collapsed onto the floor, letting out a pitiful 'uu...' sound.

“Everyone, if it were you, will you forgive this clumsy huge-breasted waitress?”

“HOW CAN I FORGIVE HER! YOU DAMNED COW, I'M GOING TO LET YOU TAKE MY HELLISH ATTACK!”

“Calm down, Touma! Calm...eh? Touma, where's your assignment?”

“...”

It wasn't there.

Kamijou could only pray that the assignment wasn't in that pile of hot food.

Part 6

August 31, 6:32 PM.

“Souma no Gen.”

Yamisaka continued to release the Seeking Demon's Bow String.

The resonance ripped through the air, telling Yamisaka Ouma that the target was rather near.

“...It's there.”

Yamisaka closed his eyes tightly and walked towards a restaurant.

At the window facing the road, there were a boy and girl sitting.

“The time has come to step onto the battlefield.”

Yamisaka activated the complicated mechanism and pulled the bow with only one hand.

“The horn for battle has been blown, Danma no Gen.”

His bow was aimed at an innocent boy on the other side of the glass.

Part 7

August 31 6:35 PM.

Kamijou Touma was completely worn out.

The assignment that he managed to dig out from the pile of food was now all soggy, and he couldn't even see the words on it. How could he hand in such a thing?

At this moment, Kamijou was like a marathon runner who had just used up all his strength. And Index could only remain stone-faced as she said,

“Bu, but Touma, the words are still visible. You can just rewrite it on new writing paper, aren't you feeling lucky that you don't have to rewrite everything again?”

“Yeah.”

Kamijou responded like he had just lost his soul.

In fact, just rewriting these three pieces of paper was a tough job.

“Damn it...if I could only just use a computer to type it out.”

Kamijou looked down at the (barely) cleaned table and muttered to himself. It was a painful thing to write such a long essay, and writing each word down with a mechanical pencil made it even worse. It was alright if it were some normal notes, but his hand would hurt if he wrote quite a few pages.

“Ahhh...”

Kamijou casually looked out of the window.

He had thought that the window would show his tired face, but on looking closer, he found that something was not right. There was a burly man in a black suit near the glass window, staring at him and Index.

No, more accurately, the burly man's eyes were shut.

At first, Kamijou thought that the burly man was using the glass window as a mirror to comb his hair. However, how could there be anyone in the world who wouldn't open his eyes when facing a mirror?

(What's this guy doing?)

Kamijou wondered. At this moment, the burly man at the window seemed to be muttering something.

His attitude was as gentle as if he had just seen an old friend he hadn't met for decades.

However,

The burly man pointed what looks like a bow attached on his right hand at Kamijou,

“!?”

Just as Kamijou stood up from the chair, the bow fired, The bow was definitely

not loaded, but the next moment, the huge glass window between the burly man and Kamijou was shattered by some mysterious force. Also, it was not just one steel wire-like force as the glass was shattered into pieces.

Blades of air that could cut even sound.

The numerous blades swung about wildly, cutting the table into numerous pieces and gliding past Index's nose-tip. However, the glass that was shattered didn't fly back, but landed directly on the floor. Before that stupid cat on Index's lap stood up, the storm of blades came attacking Kamijou.

The customers nearby stood up, ready to shout out. These people could respond so quickly to such a ridiculous power because it was a city of espers.

But no one shouted out.

DONG!

The blades of air that came at Kamijou were negated by his right hand.

Imagine Breaker. That was the power that was hidden in Kamijou Touma's right hand.

Any 'supernatural power', no matter whether it was esper or magic, would vanish on contact with his right hand. Seeing the mysterious power of Kamijou's right hand, the people nearby held their breaths in shock and almost forgot to shout out.

Kamijou, who had been attacked by numerous blades, was actually unharmed.

A storm whipped up. It seemed to be the devastation caused by the blades or air, which didn't seem to be vacuum, but air coagulated together. Also, the blades of air weren't fired out one shot at a time, but gathered in something similar to a small tornado. The moment Kamijou's right hand touched it, the entire mini-tornado was negated completely.

Kamijou bared his fangs and glared out of the broken window.

“Toma no Gen—I'm here.”

But the burly man who should have been standing outside the window was now standing behind Kamijou from who knew when.

Kamijou's body froze up, unable to move.

The burly man with his eyes tightly shut seemed to be rather satisfied with that response, and sighed as he said,

“Though I'm rather surprised by this outcome, it's a good thing to avoid having to kill recklessly. Surrender to me quickly. If you do so, I won't hurt you. Once I get the thing I want, I'll leave quickly—”

“AAHHHHH!! LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE! MY BOOK REVIEW BECAME A PILE OF SCRAPS!!!”

Kamijou's roar interrupted the burly man's voice.

The burly man revealed a puzzled look on his face. He probably never expected this. Most likely, he probably wished that everyone would be more serious in this situation.

But Kamijou didn't care about that.

Kamijou stared at the ripped—no, the essay assignment that had been shredded thoroughly with teary eyes, and said,

“YOU! IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU! YOU DID THAT, BEAR RESPONSIBILITY

FOR IT! GIVE ME BACK A BOOK REVIEW! THE TOPIC IS MOMOTAROU, THREE PIECES OF PAPER! THE CONTENT MUST BE GOOD ENOUGH TO WIN THE LITERATURE AWARD FOR SCIENCE!!”

“Who cares about you?”

“...Alright, this Kamijou-sama today is a little angry right now, you know?”

Kamijou sneered, but it seemed the burly man had disappeared into thin air.

“Wha, at?”

He looked around.

The burly man appeared behind Index.

“Let's deal with this fast. No time to play with kids.”

The burly man grabbed Index's from behind.

It was just a slight touch, yet Index's body went stiff as if she had been electrocuted, not moving at all. The stupid cat frantically ran away, pulling away from the burly man.

What's that guy trying to do? Kamijou wondered.

The burly man seemed to be targeting Index. It was true that Index was a rather special person. Her brain had 103,000 magic grimoires, and she was basically a walking treasure trove.

But in Academy City, where Science was everything, she should have been useless to espers.

If that was the case, this man who wanted to get Index was...

“You're, a magician?”

Another 'supernatural power', completely different from esper powers.

Magicians.

“That's right.”

The anonymous man clearly confirmed Kamijou's suspicions.

“I really don't know what you're doing here, you dangerous guy, using invisible blades to cut people up and then sexually harassing a girl from behind? Don't you know there's a law called the Youth lifestyle protection guidelines? You pedophile!”

“You're asking what I think about this?”

But the burly man just casually smiled.

“Since she's the Index with 103,000 grimoires, my aim should be obvious, right?”

The burly man holding Index suddenly vanished into thin air without any warning.

“Toma no Gen.” Only these words could be heard beside him.

Is this...similar to teleportation?

“Ah damn it! You never denied that you're a pedophile! You're just doing that for your own personal interest!”

Like a drowning person wanting to grasp some straw, Kamijou grabbed at where the burly man had been standing.

His right hand missed, but his left hand seemed to grab something soft in what was appeared to be empty air.

“KYAAAH!!”

There wasn't supposed to be anything there, yet he could hear Index scream,

“To, TOOOOOOOUUUUUUMMMMMAAA! WHERE ARE YOU GRABBING!!?”

“Ah?”

Kamijou grabbed again at something soft in what was supposed to be empty space.

It seemed like there was still something in the space that didn't look like it had anything. It seemed that the burly man had used some skill to hide himself, and he just couldn't see him.

The man let out a 'tch' sound in the end.

Kamijou believed that he got it right. Index and that burly man hadn't left the scene through teleportation. They were still there, it was just that he couldn't see them.

In other words, the burly man and Index were still standing in that space that 'didn't look like anything was still there'.

In other words.

What was this soft thing Kamijou Touma was grabbing onto?

“...Ah?”

Kamijou's mind instantly went blank.

At this moment, a burly man's hand suddenly appeared from the air near him as though it had just appeared from a screen.

The burly man's right wrist had a bow on it.

“Danma no Gen.”

On hearing the burly man mutter, Kamijou instinctively let go of his hand from what was not supposed to be there. A blade of air sliced through where he had been and hacked at the floor like a guillotine.

“Damn it, I got checkmated there!”

Kamijou frantically swung his hand, but he couldn't find anything

They got away.

“Damn it!”

Kamijou grabbed the neck of the stupid cat.

Kamijou was really worried about Index. Her brain contained 103,000 grimoires, so she was basically a walking magical library. With those grimoires, it was said that one could distort the rules of the whole world and accomplish whatever they wanted.

If that man wanted the grimoires, he might harm her in order to obtain the knowledge.

(This is ridiculous--)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and thought,

(--It's just because she memorized those 103,000 grimoires, so what? It's ridiculous that she got treated violently because of that!)

Kamijou clicked his tongue and turned around, ready to run out.

But he saw the smiling waitress (with a cold expression in her eyes) standing right in front of him.

And that waitress seemed to have switched from the clumsy busty girl to a hi-mobility fighter girl.

“Please wait a minute, mister.”

“Ah?”

Kamijou again inspected his surroundings.

The huge glass windows was opened like butter, and the restaurant table had been cut up into pieces. Kamijou didn't know how much all these cost, but he knew that they were even more expensive than ordinary furniture.

“...Ah...”

Kamijou's lips curled.

The muscular shopkeeper walked out from inside the shop with a smile on his face.

Part 8

August 31 7:30 PM.

“DAMN IT! THAT BASTARD! I'LL MURDER THAT PEDOPHILE!!”

Kamijou grabbed the stupid cat and ran around in the dark alleys.

Of course, he ran away from the restaurant. The muscular shopkeeper, smiling waitress and a few of those brave and kind customers had chased him around for about an hour, causing him to sneak here and duck there up till now, and he still didn't know whether he had managed to shake them all.

Summer vacation homework wasn't important now, this commotion would get him expelled.

“Fufu...fufufu, fufufufufufufu!!”

Running around in the dark alleys, Kamijou let out a dangerous smirk.

Right now, Kamijou's rage was at its limit. There was already so little time left, and just when he was rushing through his homework, he actually got disturbed by a real pedophile, causing him to get blamed and also possibly end up being expelled. It was no wonder he was infuriated.

(Speaking of which, is she going to be alright?)

Kamijou sighed.

Though Index was affiliated to the witch hunting section Necessarius of the Anglican Church, Kamijou was suspicious whether or not that pint-sized girl had

any combat abilities.

Kamijou really wanted to get Index back from that pervert, but he couldn't find a clue.

(Alright, now what?)

Just as Kamijou was tilting his head and racking his brain, the cat in his arms suddenly jumped out and landed on the floor. Without looking back at Kamijou, it ran forward.

“Ah, oi! Wait a minute!”

Just as Kamijou was really bothered by this, he suddenly remembered something.

It's said that cats have an acute sense of smell. No wait, that's not right, the ones with acute sense of smell are dogs, right? No wait, it should still be more alert than humans. No wait, he only heard of police dogs and no police cats, right? Damn it, is it sensitive or not!?

Full of question marks in his mind, Kamijou decided to run behind the calico cat and try it out. Perhaps it could hear or sniff out Index's position.

The stupid cat was moving really fast.

Kamijou could only squeeze out all his strength as he followed the cat, trying not to lose it. He continued to run, and run, and run.

Finally, the place the stupid cat arrived at it...

“...Oi, isn't this the back door of a hotel?”

The hotel was actually more of a multi purpose building. There were department stores, restaurants, guest rooms, indoor play parks and spas; it could be said to have everything. But basically, it was still an international hotel enterprise.

Kamijou looked up at the wall of the 'hotel', and had a bad feeling about this. Did that pedophile really bring Index to such a place? If that were the case, this would be a real unrivalled pervert. Thinking about this, Kamijou's face went

green.

At this moment, Kamijou glanced, and saw the stupid cat looking for something.

“?”

Kamijou casually looked over. The stupid cat climbed up a plastic bin, and used his front feet to open the lid cleanly and buried his entire face into the bin and searching.

Kamijou again looked up at this building.

It was a rather large hotel. Basically, Academy City used an exclusion policy, so many people may think that the city didn't need any hotels, but actually, there were some hotels set up for student activities. And in order to boost Academy City's image, these hotels were ridiculously posh (of course, besides these, there practically wouldn't be any guests living here. So to make up for the losses, they could only set up secondary enterprises like department stores or indoor play parks).

Of course, the restaurants in this building were highly rated. The trash thrown from the restaurant should have been a lot more classy than normal...

“You bastard--! You don't know how to be grateful to your master!? Index even brought you back!”

Kamijou roared at the cat, but the stupid cat merely purred.

The conclusion was: A stupid cat is just a stupid cat.

Part 9

August 31 8:15 PM.

In fact, Yamisaka Ouma was standing on the roof of the hotel the stupid cat wouldn't budge from. He was sitting on the floor with his back leaning on the water tower. Index was tied up and lying on her side.

Yamisaka looked up at the sky and clicked his tongue. According to the information he had, there may be satellites monitoring the inside and surroundings of Academy City, but up till now, he hadn't even gotten a single disturbance, let alone disruption. The security system in Academy City couldn't be this inept; it seemed that they were just waiting for now.

(...Doesn't matter anyway, I'll just break through their trap after I get what I want.)

Yamisaka already knew that it would end up like this, so he didn't feel surprised.

He sighed and opened his tightly shut eyes.

Right now, if there had been anyone nearby, they would have been so shocked that they would forget to breathe.

He didn't have any terrifying expression, nor did he have any unique prosthetic eyes.

His eyes were so normal.

Those eyes didn't match the image of a self-proclaimed magician fighter in a black suit. It was a pair of pure eyes that could only be suited for a boy who hadn't seen the dark side of the world.

Yamisaka took out a photo from his suit.

The person in the photo was a woman who was unrelated to Yamisaka.

She was older than Yamisaka by 2 or 3 years, and she was at an age where she could no longer be called a girl. She was extremely skinny, and had white skin, and she gave the impression that she would faint if she stood under a hot summer sun for more than 30 minutes.

In fact, this impression wasn't wrong. She had already been ill when he had first met her. Also, what she had wasn't an ordinary illness, but a cursed disease that

the medical world couldn't figure out. In terms of Eastern context, it was like some voodoo spell that was cast using a mirror and a sword, and in Western context, it was a magic that was 'similar to a curse'. However, it didn't matter what they called it; basically, this woman was in a condition where there was no cure for her, and she could die any second.

But the dying woman didn't ask Yamisaka to save her.

That woman couldn't do anything, and could only reveal a tired smile.

Yamisaka and that woman weren't related. They weren't relatives nor friends. Both of them would occasionally talk to each other in the garden of the hospital, and that woman didn't even realize that Yamisaka's a magician. Yamisaka didn't even have any need to step up for that woman. There was no reason for him to risk his life.

But to Yamisaka, up till then, he had always thought that magicians were all-powerful.

It was because he hadn't wanted to face any setbacks that he swore to be a magician.

Yamisaka didn't care whether that woman was dead or alive. But if he couldn't even save a dying woman, could he call himself 'all-powerful'? Could he still boast that he 'wouldn't meet any setbacks' again? He wouldn't be stopped by such a simple thing. He wouldn't let such a simple thing force him to give up on his goal.

It was just that.

It was just a simple idea.

“...Humph.”

Yamisaka placed the photo back into his Western suit. He then closed his eyes as if he was shutting off all human emotions. He lifted his head up. To Yamisaka, whose 5 senses had been enhanced, closing one or two of his five senses wouldn't be a hindrance to him.

Index was right in front of him. The girl who was presumably all tied up should

be still lying on the concrete surface, but she got right up, sitting down cross-legged and giving an unhappy look.

“Hm, that was surprising. You managed to undo two knots within such a short time. Rope binding spells aren't my specialty, but it's not easy for a lesser demon to escape from my ropes.”

Though the ropes that were intertwined on Index were as thin as cables, they were authentic Shimenawa (literally: enclosing ropes). In other words, she was locked in a very small boundary.

Facing such a perilous situation, Index didn't show any fear on hear face.

“Thus the rope is a culture of torture that the Japanese came up with, such an erratic manner of tying isn't going to force me to say anything.”

The girl said casually.

Rope binding. Though it looked ordinary, it was a cruel method of torture that was so powerful it could kill. For example, when one tied a convict's wrists up and left him for two days, the convict would see the palms start to swell because of the lack of blood flow. At that point, the psychological torture could be a lot worse than the physical torture.

Index glared at Yamisaka.

In fact, the girl who kept the 103,000 grimoires in her head was already used to this kind of crisis. So her body had some sort of resistance. For example, she could adjust her breathing to let her enter a state of anemia to decrease the pain.

But the effect was still limited.

If her blood flow was sealed up and she saw her hands and feet start to rot, she didn't believe that she could maintain her sanity. Of course, nobody has this belief.

Although Index had another defense system that even she didn't know of, unfortunately, this system had been destroyed by that boy's right hand.

At that moment, Yamisaka sighed.

“I see. As expected of an Anglican Church member of the branch that specializes in hunting witches and torture. You won't submit even if you turn into ash?”

“...Turn into ash...That's a lousy way of hinting.”

“No, I don't have that idea at all. In fact, I don't intend to torture you.”

“If you don't intend to torture me, why did you tie me up so tightly? Such a method of tying me is pressing down on my blood vessels and lungs. If you don't intend to kill me, you could have just tied my thumbs slightly so that I can't move.”

“I see. As expected of an expert.”

Yamisaka casually replied, and he reached his hand out to undo a few of Index's knots according to her directions. Such an action shocked Index. As an enemy, he was really too nice.

But Yamisaka merely said casually,

“I said it before, I'm not here to torture you.”

But he added on,

“But I do want to take away a grimoire from your head.”

Index glared angrily at Yamisaka.

It was her responsibility to protect the 103,000 grimoires in her head.

“Alright.”

Facing the girl's stare, Yamisaka looked rather carefree and said,

“It'll take some time to prepare. I have to prepare a boundary to increase the effects first.”

Part 10

August 31, 9:21 PM.

He had wasted a lot of time with the distraction the stupid cat had made.

Kamijou grabbed the stupid cat's neck as he continued to sprint wildly in the night street. As it was past dinner time, the students who had been outside had disappeared like a low tide. The only sounds that could be heard on this empty street came from a cable broadcast and a row of television sets in the front of an electronics shop. In a customer-less convenience store, a man who looked like a student was just standing about at the cashier.

(This is bad. It's been so long, things have probably gotten bad by now.)

Kamijou exhaled, hoping that he could ease his anxiety.

The burly man who took Index away probably didn't want to kill her...probably. If that was the case, he shouldn't cause any harm to her. But that didn't mean that the situation was looking good.

Right now, the most troublesome thing was that Kamijou didn't even have any clues. No matter how he continued to run forward, he had a feeling that he was running further and further away. No matter what he did, it would just add on to his anxiety.

(And the problem is that I can't stand around at the same place! Damn it, is my method of running to make up for the lack of information not enough!?)

That white nun really gives so many problems! Kamijou cursed as he turned around the corner with such momentum.

A girl who was coming around the corner nearly knocked into him.

“AHHH!! Wha, what are you doing here!?”

The girl who didn't sound like a girl had shoulder length tea-colored hair and a look that didn't want to admit defeat. She had a grey pleated skirt, a short-

sleeved shirt and a thin summer jacket.

“I finally found you! Why did you leave me behind and run off with that fake Unabara!? What happened to you during the day? It seems like you got involved in the tower collapse incident. Are you hurt? Really, if you're alright, you should have called me to tell me that you're alright...eh? Don't you know my cell phone number?”

Misaka Mikoto.

An elite student in the famed esper development school Tokiwadai Middle School, and one of the 7 Level 5 espers in Academy City. She was a girl with the Electromaster ability, and the electric shocks she released from her bangs could reach 1 billion volts. Kamijou and her were more rivals than friends, but right now, Kamijou didn't have time to bother with her as he turned around the corner.

Completely ignored, Mikoto shouted,

“E, EH!? OI, WAIT UP! WHY ARE YOU IGNORING ME!?”

Kamijou heard Mikoto shout at him, but he ignored her.

He continued to run.

“OI! THAT'S TOO MUCH ALREADY!!”

Kamijou decided to ignore her completely.

There was no reason for her to get involved in this.

“You, better pay attention—always making people angry...”

Pa! Kamijou could hear sparks from behind.

Shocked, he turned back to see Mikoto's bangs let out bluish-white sparks. Like what was just described, Mikoto's shocks could reach 1 billion volts. If the title 'Railgun' wasn't legendary enough, perhaps a natural electric shock could be understood more easily.

Kamijou stretched his right hand out.

Any supernatural power, whether esper or magic could be negated by this right hand on contact. Though Kamijou knew that his right hand could negate Mikoto's railgun, he still found it terrifying. Besides, if he didn't negate it completely, the aftermath couldn't even be imagined.

PAM! Mikoto's bangs let out some bluish-white electrical flashes.

BOOM! The sparks instantly ripped through the air.

“!?”

But the sparks weren't aimed at Kamijou, instead they hit a nearby cleaning robot which just so happened to be cleaning up some chewing gum on the ground.

In a moment, the sound generator of the cleaning robot started to explode from inside. BAM! The shockwave-like impact destroyed the sound generator, causing the glass doors of the nearby department stores to tremble.

Of course Kamijou, who was just within the vicinity of this ear-deafening power, was severely affected. The shockwave went through his ears and into his body, robbing him of his balance and causing him to stumble about. He could only stop and shake his head that was in chaos thoroughly. Even the stupid cat in Kamijou's hand went from a cute 'nyanya' cry of complaint to an agitated 'KYAKYA!' that was like a scream.

And this time, Mikoto seemed to be satisfied that Kamijou stopped and said,

“Humph you finally stopped. Really, almost knocking into me, and you didn't even say sorry. Really, you...eh? What's wrong? Why do you look like you're about to cry!?”

“I'M REALLY IN A HURRY, YOU KNOW!! I HAVE TO SETTLE MY HOMEWORK AND A KIDNAPPING AND A RESTAURANT INCIDENT WHERE I ENDED UP EATING A FREE MEAL!!! PLEASE TRY AND UNDERSTAND FOR NOW, WILL YOU!!?”

Almost giving up, Kamijou roared, causing Mikoto to be taken aback.

But he didn't care, and continued,

“WHAT IS IT? DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING YOU WANT WITH ME!? IF THERE IS, PLEASE ANSWER WITHIN 40 SECONDS AFTER THE BEEP! BEEP—!!”

“Eh? Ah? What.? It's nothing, it's just that I'm a little angry that you ignored me. It's nothing much...nothing much at all...”

“EXCUSE ME!!!”

Kamijou turned around and sprinted away from Mikoto.

If he calmly analyzed this, he could have gotten hints that she seemed to have feelings for him, but right now, Kamijou didn't have time to calmly analyze.

“Ah...wait! YOU'RE GOING OFF LIKE THIS? OI!!”

Kamijou heard Mikoto shouting at him, but he ignored it.

And he continued to run.

Part 11

August 31, 9:52 PM.

Index didn't seem to be able to understand what was going on.

At first, she had thought that the magician in front of her was an enemy, but he had tied Index up without any intention of hurting her. Right now, he was using some thin shimenawa to set up a boundary around her (it seemed like he was just being humble when he had said that rope binding wasn't one of his specialties), ignoring Index completely, and only noticing in passing not to let Index escape.

To a girl, it was disrespectful to be tied up and left aside, but from a prisoner's point of view, this was already a treatment of the highest class.

Torture in witch hunting was like squeezing out orange juice. Basically, it was about squeezing out the body (orange) and getting the information (juice). As for the orange that was squeezed, nobody would care about them. Those who would feel pity for the oranges wouldn't think of imprisoning others right from the beginning.

Of course, there were only a few individuals who could execute torture among the Anglican Church. People like Index, who never had any combat training, they couldn't even hurt others. In fact, most of the inquisitors who attended a 'witch trial' were either hypnotized or forced to drink potions to hide their insecurities. Only a few among the few could interrogate people with a completely clear mind.

Index stared at the magician who was setting up the boundary in front of him.

It seemed like he was a person who couldn't squeeze an orange out.

Was he weak-hearted?

Or was it because...

Part 12

August 31, 10:07 PM.

“Huff! Huff!”

Kamijou tried to get away from Misaka Mikoto as he ran about like a headless fly, but right now, he still couldn't find Index.

“Ahh, damn it! There's only 2 hours before the day ends! What do I do with my assignments? IF I DON'T SETTLE THIS QUICKLY, I'LL KILL THAT DAMNED PEDOPHILE!!!”

Kamijou shouted out what sounded like some dangerous muttering to himself (or rather, shouting to himself), glaring viciously as he continued to run about in the darkness.

But his shouting was just to hold back that insecurity that was rising within him. It had been several hours since Index had been taken away.

(It's too much to do this alone. Should I just ask security for help?)

The security system in Academy City was different from ordinary policemen; they were made up of Anti-Skill and Judgment who specialized in taking on espers. Anti-Skill members consisted of teachers with modern age weapons, and Judgment members were chosen espers among the students.

Even if the enemy hid himself to avoid detection, a mind reader could tell where the enemy went from what he had left behind at the scene of the crime. Besides, if he wanted to take Index back, it was safer to overcome the enemy with human-wave tactics.

(But...)

Kamijou gritted his teeth. Index was a resident of the magic world, and not Academy City. She was like an illegal immigrant. If he asked them for help, there would most likely be other troublesome matters in the future.

(What should I do?)

Kamijou was in a fix. At that moment, an Anti-Skill member who was standing in front walked over at him. Kamijou wondered, 'do I look so panicky?' Just as Kamijou was still undecided on whether he should discuss this with Anti-Skill, the male Anti-Skill member walked up to him.

Before Kamijou could say anything, the Anti-Skill member spoke up,

“Were you the one who destroyed the glass of the restaurant in District 7?”

“Eh?”

“The shopkeeper reported the incident to us, and we let the mind reader extract the image of the person from his memory. Hold on, I seem to have seen you

before. Oh, during the day, there was a tower collapse in District 7, and someone spotted you at the scene. Because of that, the 2nd level orange warning was issued. Don't tell me the 1st level red warning after that was related to you...”

“...Eh.”

Kamijou carried a stiff smile and turned around.

And then ran away for his dear life.

Though he had let Tsuchimikado handle that magician who couldn't go anywhere, it was unknown whether Tsuchimikado took care of him properly. As Kamijou thought of this, he started to flee from the scene at an amazing speed.

“Ah, oi! You! Stop right there!”

Who would listen to you? Kamijou sprinted down the road at a speed a star sprinter could be proud of. *Can I shake that guy off? Did I shake him off? Hahaha, you slow Anti-Skill!* Just as Kamijou was indulging in the delight of victory, a gunshot rang out behind him.

Looking back, the Anti-Skill member had whipped out a .22 handgun that was smoking from the barrel.

The first shot was a close one. That took guts.

“ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL ME!? YOU DAMNED ANTI-SKILL, WHAT ARE YOU TREATING HUMAN LIFE AS!!”

“Don't worry, I respect the human rights of youths. That was a rubber bullet.”

“So it wasn't a blank...I'll get a few bones broken if I get hit by them...”:

Kamijou cried out as he snuck into another alley. What time it was, whether he had finished his homework, those weren't important anymore. Was Index safe?

Part 13

August 31, 10:52 PM.

There were numerous ropes set up on the ropes.

Looking from afar, it was like the many flags of different countries at an Olympics. With the water tower as the peak, the ropes extended out in all directions out to the railings on the edges of the tower. There were numerous talismans stuck onto the ropes, each made from washi paper and written in ink.

Index, who was tied up and sitting on the floor, said in surprise,

"Is that...a Kagura stage?"

As what the name implies, a Kagura was a choreography that was meant to entertain the gods.

"It's not really something that impressive. It's just a Bon Odori at most."

It was basically a fusion of Shintoism and Buddhism, Yamisaka described.

Now that he mentioned it, the water tower did look like a peak, and the ropes that extended down from the peak looked like rows of lanterns (but the bon odoris Index knew of was from the illustrations of books, and the habit of setting a peak and rows of lanterns were only a recent culture).

Of course, a choreography couldn't be compared to a mere dance. But in terms of the functions, the origin of a Bon Odori was to act as a dance to calm the souls of the dead--a Kagura and a Bon Odori were similar in this spiritual aspect.

In a Bon Odori, people would prepare a special place. Everyone would then go around according to a specific guideline...this was to help interact with the spiritual world better. The Western demon worship spell 'Roshtein's Corridor' and the modern urban horror legend 'Squared Mountain Hut' were developed in different settings under the same concept.

(But why did he set up such a place? Is he trying to put something on me--it

hurts!)

Her butt seemed to have squashed something. Moving her body away to look, it was a cell phone. Though Kamijou had given Index a free cell phone, Index didn't know how to use it. Right now, the phone's screen was flashing for some reason. In order to avoid angering Yamisaka, Index moved the hand tied behind her back and grabbed the phone before hiding it well. It seemed that she had pressed a few buttons while doing so, but Index didn't care.

Luckily, Yamisaka didn't seem to notice it.

Yamisaka raised the bow on his right wrist and boasted,

"Don't worry. I just set up the boundary to increase this thing's effectiveness. This bow was originally meant to be used for a Bon Odori."

Index looked around and then compared what she saw to the knowledge in her head, and said,

"...Azusayumi?"

"That's really impressive, that magic library in your brain even encompasses Japanese magic."

An azusayumi--a ritual instrument in Japanese Shintoism. The purpose wasn't to shoot arrows, but to use the pulling of the bow to make sounds. It was said that the impact could shake demons up. It was originally an instrument in a Kagura, and the aim was for the miko playing it to lead the dancers and make them more enthusiastic and the ritual more smooth flowing.

"Originally, this bow's power could only correct spiritual damage."

Yamisaka pointed at the roof and said,

"But if I can fulfill a set condition like this--I can read the target's thoughts. That's right, even the 103,000 grimoires you're trying so hard to protect won't be a secret any longer."

Index was shocked. The next moment, with the numerous intertwined ropes as center, the entire space let out a dim glow. Yamisaka tweaked the mechanism

and pulled the bow of the azusayumi.

"NO, YOU CANT!"

Index shrieked like a child,

"THESE GRIMOIRES AREN'T LIKE WHAT YOU THOUGHT! ANY ORDINARY PERSON WILL GO CRAZY ON SEEING IT! EVEN A MAGICIAN CAN'T TAKE THE BURDEN OF OVER 30 BOOKS! YOU SHOULD KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF ANYONE OTHER THAN ME READ THE MORE THAN 100,000 GRIMOIRES!!"

Her tone seemed to indicate that she was worried about the enemy, but Yamisaka Ouma merely smiled.

He smiled silently and said,

"Don't worry. I know."

Part 14

August 31, 11:10 PM.

Just as Kamijou was running about in the dark alleys while trying to shake off the Anti-Skill member, he heard 'that voice'.

Index and that pervert's voices could be heard from the cell phone. Index's free phone was always turned off, but now it had switched on somehow on its own, but the voice sounded like the phone was covered by cloth, and it didn't sound like the conversation was intended for Kamijou. The feeling was like he was eavesdropping on other people's conversation.

Click.

He could hear some strange sound from the roof of a tower far away, and it was starting to glow like there was a huge pillar of light that was headed to the sky.

(That is...? Damn it, isn't that the hotel from just now? Why did I tire myself out by running like that?)

Of course, there was no proof that Index was there. But since there were no other clues, he couldn't ignore any abnormal places. Kamijou then turned his head around and ran over there.

Part 15

August 31, 11:20 PM.

The moment the ritual started, there was a supernatural phenomenon.

In this huge boundary that was surrounded by light, Yamisaka continued to pull the bow, yet his body was trembling like he had the flu. Disgusting sweat flowed down his body, and the focus of his eyes started to waver.

Right now, what Yamisaka was doing was to basically look into Index's inner world. There was no mistake in the spell and method; the spell itself wasn't dangerous at all, there were no side effects.

But Yamisaka's life was trickling bit by bit.

The 103,000 grimoires that were hidden in that girl's heart were that vicious.

"--,----!!"

Yamisaka Ouma was having a severe migraine and couldn't say anything. It was as though his skull was being hammered.

In fact, Yamisaka didn't intend to obtain the full knowledge of the 103,000

grimoires. It was impossible to download such a large number of grimoires into his head.

However, he just needed one. The name of that grimoire was 'baopuzi'. In Chinese culture, it was a grimoire that was said to teach people how to be a 'deity' and live an immortal life. It should have a record of what was called 'alchemy'; in other words, it had a method of creating an immortal elixir that could heal any disease or curse.

He just needed this book.

He didn't want to see a counterfeit or a copy with a wrong explanation, but rather, he wanted a grimoire that was very close to the original and was high in purity. He just needed that one grimoire.

"---!!!"

However, he had never expected it to be so devastating.

At this point, Yamisaka finally realized why it had been heavily modified into 'counterfeits' or 'copies' with so little purity. It was because the toxicity of the original was too great. If they hadn't lowered or removed the purity, no ordinary person could even read it.

Yamisaka stared at the girl who was screaming, telling him to stop.

It was unbelievable that this girl had actually managed to read all 103,000 grimoires, when reading just one page alone was enough to cause a huge migraine in his head.

This wasn't something that any human could do.

The girl who had achieved such an amazing feat was actually the most abnormal person.

"---!!!"

Each time he pulled the bow, the toxic grimoires started to flow into his mind page by page. Each page of poison started to flow in like milk mixing into coffee, fusing with Yamisaka's soul and corroding it.

But Yamisaka still continued to grit his teeth and pull the bow.

Up till now in his life, he had always thought that magicians were all powerful. It had been because he didn't want to meet any more setbacks that he had sworn to be a magician. Thus, he wouldn't be stopped by such a thing. That woman who was dying. That woman who didn't even have the strength to ask for help. That weak woman who could only smile as she gradually stepped towards death. If he couldn't even save such an ordinary woman, how could he shamelessly declare about being 'all-powerful', what 'not wanting to suffer any setbacks'? How could he let such an ordinary woman suffer and leave a black mark on his record?

Thus, Yamisaka continued to pull the bow.

Even if blood continued to flow out of his eyes and ears, he wanted that grimoire.

Letting himself get scarred and suffer the sin of wanting to fulfill his desire.

It was definitely not because of that ordinary woman.

It was definitely not because of that ordinary woman at all!

Part 16

August 31, 11:20 PM.

Kamijou pushed open the back door of the tower, rushed in and dashed up the stairs.

"...That's not right."

Running up the stairs, Kamijou heard Index's voice from the cell phone.

"I understand. That azusayumi--because the power was increased too much, your thoughts entered my mind, so I understand."

The girl sounded really anguished, and it seemed that she would start to cry at anytime.

The girl seemed to be gradually understanding the heart that was getting destroyed.

"You just liked that woman. So you would risk your life to save her. But to save her, you have to hurt others, you have to commit a sin. And you didn't want to let that woman bear that responsibility. *Because of you, I committed this sin, if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have committed this sin.* YOU DIDN'T WANT TO SAY THAT NO MATTER WHAT!"

Index shouted in order to stop him.

"IT'S JUST THAT SIMPLE! SO, SO THAT'S WHY YOU CAN'T DESTROY YOURSELF! IF YOU DESTROY YOURSELF, EVEN IF YOU UNDO THE CURSE ON THAT WOMAN, YOU'LL LET HER LIVE A LIFE OF GUILT!!"

Kamijou continued to run, gritting his teeth.

"IF YOU REALLY WANT TO SAVE THAT WOMAN, EVEN IF YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE IN THE WORLD WHO WANTS TO SAVE HER, EVEN IF YOU DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP, IF YOU CAN'T GIVE UP ON A PERSON WHO'S CURSED TO DIE, THAT'S ALL THE MORE REASON WHY YOU SHOULDN'T RELY ON THIS CORRUPTED GRIMOIRE!"

I see. Kamijou understood everything.

Reaching the highest level, Kamijou continued to dash up to the end of the stairs, where the door leading to the roof was. It was too much of a hassle to grab the handle of the door and open it. Kamijou just kicked it down.

Part 17

August 31, 11:47 PM.

The moment he entered the roof, Kamijou's right hand seemed to touch something.

It was actually one of the ropes used for the boundary. The boundary seemed to vanish on contact with Kamijou's fingertips like a gust. Then, the destruction started to spread out like a fuse being lit.

At that moment, the collapse started to spread from one rope to another. After a while, the light that was scattered from the entire place vanished. Looking again, the scene had reverted back to what was supposed to be a hotel roof.

The stupid cat cleanly slipped out of Kamijou's arms and down to the floor.

The stupid cat left Kamijou, most likely unaware that the situation was dangerous as it moved towards the girl who was sitting over there without any sense of danger.

That girl Index...for some reason, she was messily tied up. But at least she didn't look hurt, and her clothes didn't seem tattered.

Kamijou looked away.

He was staring at the man who was standing some distance away from Index.

That pervert--correction, that magician.

That burly man had blood vessels pulsating all over his skin. His sweating made him appear as if he had just gotten drenched. Tear-like blood started to drip from his tightly shut eyes--one of them, at least, as it flowed across his face.

The anonymous magician asked Kamijou,

"...Is this wrong?"

The magician activated the bow and said,

"Is it wrong even though I risked my life in order to protect someone?"

Silence permeated throughout the air.

The night wind blew between both of them. A cold, spine-chilling, hard wind.

"Of course...it's wrong."

Kamijou answered.

"You should understand how sad it is for someone important to die. Seeing that person struggling painfully yet unable to do anything or help; you should understand that feeling clearly."

Kamijou knew that feeling.

In the past, he had made another person in that white hospital room experience that pain, so he understood.

"At that moment, you'll start to panic, feel anguished, sad, heartbroken, afraid, trembling, wail, cry...so that's why you shouldn't do that. You can't let others experience that feeling."

The anonymous magician didn't answer; he merely raised his bow silently.

He definitely knew what was right and what was wrong.

But whatever the case was, the anonymous magician didn't want to give up.

Because he was afraid.

The most important person to him was about to die in front of him, and that, was the scariest thing to him in this world.

"Danma no Gen."

The name of a spell that could create blades of compressed air. On hearing that voice, Kamijou moved forward. He clenched his right fist to stop this magician that was too gentle and weak-hearted.

But Kamijou's fist didn't hit that magician.

Because before the bow got pulled, the magician's body tumbled and collapsed.

The anonymous magician was unable to stand up.

Red fluid started to flow between the floor and his body.

Kamijou's expression changed as he rushed to the unconscious magician.

Perhaps since he felt that there was someone beside him, the magician started to speak.

The voice accompanied the presence of blood as it came out through the bloody red lips.

"So useless. All I did was read a grimoire...and I ended up like this."

He sounded really tired,

"It seems like someone weak like me must be daydreaming about even getting an Original. Haha, what in the world. My life's full of setbacks. This is the third time I've given up in my life."

"..."

"But I still couldn't give up."

The magician smiled as he faced the moon floating in the sky,

"Just this, no matter what, I still can't give up."

His lip movements were gradually becoming slower, until he almost stopped completely.

Index gasped, and Kamijou heard it.

Kamijou bit his lips hard, and then said.

Charge.

The stupid cat received the order and jumped at the magician face, scratching it hard.

"GYAAHHHHHH!!!"

"STOP GETTING DEPRESSED IN YOUR OWN TRAGIC ENDING, ALRIGHT!? YOU IDIOT!!"

Kamijou looked down at the magician who was looking rather energetic all of a sudden as he rolled on the floor. He sighed and said,

"This can be considered revenge for my summer vacation homework. It's because of you that I definitely can't finish my homework. I'll end up being called out to stand in the corridor as punishment because I decided to help you. It's not too bad to reward you with a cat punch, right?"

The magician's mouth opened and closed as he tried to say something, but Kamijou ignored it and continued to talk on at will,

"Alright, where's that 'precious person' of yours?"

"Gya, uu...what did you say?"

"I say, there's no need to use the Index to solve this, right?"

Kamijou scratched his head lightly and said,

"For example, this right hand of mine is called the Imagine Breaker. Any 'supernatural power', no matter esper or magic will disappear without a trace on contact with my right hand. Of course, even some ridiculous power like curses aren't exempt."

Kamijou reached out his right hand, looking like he was about to shake hands with the magician.

The magician's expression froze.

"Ah...?"

"Though I'm not a magician, and I don't know what sort of gimmick curses are, as long as this right hand is here, any problem can be settled, right?"

"Tha, ah...that's impossible."

"There's nothing impossible. Didn't you see it once? Those wind blades you created were destroyed by my right hand. Listen up, I'll tell you this. This may sound illogical, but this right hand does possess such a power."

The unknown magician was stunned. He blankly listened to every single word Kamijou said.

Seeing this 180 degrees transformation, he obviously didn't know how to respond.

This magician had originally given up in despair; he thought that hope wouldn't descend again.

But on the other side, Kamijou nonchalantly scratched his head and said,

"Alright. Perhaps you're tired, but I have to ask you to let me. If I don't come back by 7 tomorrow, I won't be able to make it to the opening ceremony tomorrow...hold on. Are there still trains at this hour? Ah, also, did you just say that it was a 'curse'? Like those tricks bad magicians in those graphic novels love to play with? If so, do we have to get rid of the bad magicians? How troublesome!"

Kamijou continued to nag on alone, and the magician could only listen silently.

Finally, he said.

Afraid that the hope he finally grabbed would disappear again, he stuttered as he asked,

"Ah...don't tell me, that's true."

"Such nonsense. Because of you, I've given up on my summer vacation homework. If I don't show something for it, it's really wasted."

Kamijou impatiently said,

"So you have to bear responsibility. I want you to lead me even if I have to drag you. I don't care about the 1st level red alert, I'll definitely save that person who's most important to you. No matter what, at least you better give me a reason as to why I forgot to finish my assignments."

Time for the magician seemed to stop. Kamijou smirked and laughed,

"So I need your help. Nobody else can do. Only your power can help me. No matter what, I have to ask you for help. Don't you want to save her? With your own hands?"

Uu, ah...

Kamijou's words made the magician's face wince.

His face was covered with tears like ice that was melting.

Kamijou sighed and thought casually

"Alright, seems like I can only give up on my homework...give up...hold on, hey, can I go get my vacation homework before I leave?"

September 1, 0:00 AM.

END

Epilogue: Night of Ending. *Welcome_to_Tomorrow.*

September 01, 0:00 AM (Timeover).

"Operation's over. Good work, everyone."

These words caused Yoshikawa Kikyou to wake up. She didn't know what time it was or where she was. She just knew that she was lying on a bed, and could see a blue-tiled floor and walls. Only the ceiling was white in color. The walls near the ceiling had a row of glass windows, and it looked like the corridor.

From a place she couldn't see, she could hear the clanking sound of metal. A long fiber fabric was hanging over her head like a guillotine, so she couldn't look below her head. She could only move her neck about; she couldn't even feel her other body parts, let alone move them.

At this moment, a person looked over at Yoshikawa's face.

It was a middle-aged man with his hair kept inside a green surgical cap, and his mouth and nose kept in a huge mask of the same color. This frog-faced middle aged man looked down at Yoshikawa, as if he was looking at his childhood friend who had just woken up from a nap.

Yoshikawa finally realized where she was, and clicked her tongue 'Tch'.

"That's too much. You only used a local anesthetic for a heart operation."

"The lesser the burden, the better, isn't it?"

The local anesthetic was originally used for minor operations like removing the appendix. During the operation, the patient would remain conscious, and some patients would even request a small mirror to see the wounds of their operation.

However, they couldn't possibly use local anesthetic for heavy operations like a heart surgery. This wasn't because of whether or not there were disadvantages,

but rather, it was impossible. It was like using the toes to hold a scalpel to operate.

Yet this doctor did it, and the operation went well.

Yoshikawa couldn't even imagine how he had done it. Perhaps he had developed a new operation technique.

Heaven Canceller.

No serious wounds or diseases were a match for this doctor. He could choose to use any means to heal his patients. The medical world 'outside', and even the management of Academy City wouldn't agree to the new skills and theories he proposed. He had only one belief, and that was to never give up on the patient. He carried this one belief and made a path for himself.

Some said that his skills could even distort God's rules. It was said that he had once created some mysterious life support device that could overcome the problems of aging and life limit of a person through some mysterious theory. No one knew what he had felt after he achieved this research, but ever since that, there hadn't been any news about him continuing with any life-related research. Right now, the only experimental device in the world was said to be placed in a windowless building.

"...So this means I was saved?"

"Of course. Who do you think did the operation?"

This doctor would never mention the hard work in front of patients and would always say things so casually.

"But really, that was a close shave. No matter how good I am, I still can't heal a dead person. If you want to thank someone, then thank that boy."

"That boy...did he do something? Hold on, I should have been shot with a military pistol through my heart, why am I still alive?"

"More accurately, what was shot through wasn't the heart but the coronary artery. Either way, if you weren't healed immediately, you would have died immediately."

The coronary artery. The largest artery in the human body. It was certain death once it broke. It was like using a knife to cut the carotid.

"If so, then how..."

"Hm. That boy seems to have the ability to manipulate blood flow. He let your blood flow through the broken artery without losing even a single drop of blood. Thanks to him, you were able to survive being sent all the way here, and I could temporarily use an artificial artery to connect your artery and push you into the operation room. Ahh, you should really thank that boy. He definitely lost consciousness, yet he was still able to exert his power onto you until you were sent into the operation room."

"..."

Yoshikawa remained stunned as she listened to the doctor.

"It's been past three hours since you were sent in here. That boy's injury doesn't look so good, and it was a headache for the other doctors to try and take out the fragments of the bullet that are lodged in the front of his frontal lobe. I'm about to go over and help right now. Do you have any message to pass to me?"

"...Local anesthetic won't be used in that boy's operation, right?"

She knew that this was impossible, but she still asked on instinct.

"Is he still alright?"

"Un? The front of his frontal lobe seems to be damaged, and it will affect his verbal and calculation abilities."

"Calculation ability..."

This was critical damage to Accelerator, as he had to first calculate the 'direction before reflection' and 'direction after reflection' before he could use his ability. Even if he could unconsciously use the reflection ability, it was because he unknowingly calculated the simplest formula.

He wouldn't be able to use his ability, even the most basic reflection.

"Don't worry, he'll be alright."

The doctor seemed to understand what Yoshikawa was thinking and said,

"My policy is to make the impossible possible. I'll definitely let him be able to use his verbal and calculation abilities. Definitely."

The last word was the only word that was spoken in a different half-joking tone with a higher pitch at the end.

Yoshikawa held her breath. The doctor then said with a casual tone,

"However, I have to get other people's agreement first. Since you created those troublesome things, I'll just use them. I just need to connect 10,000 brains and make up a person's verbal and calculation abilities. That should be simple, right?"

10,000. The Sisters. Last Order.

"Tha, that's right! What about that child!?"

"Ah. You're talking about that girl in the glass container? No need to worry about her. Luckily, we have a girl who's in a similar condition to her. Her serial number seem to be 10,032, named Misaka Imouto."

"Hold, hold on, there's...an incubator here?"

"If it's something the patient needs, I can get one. Also, I talked to her before. It's said that these 10,000 clones can form a network to do calculations. I intend to use that thing to make up for the lost parts in that boy's brain. Don't worry, that's different from bringing someone who lost his memories to me. It's not hard to replace a lost ability."

Though the doctor said it rather casually, there was a sad look on his face.

A loss of memory.

Even that doctor couldn't recover the memories of the High School student who was admitted in late July. Perhaps that was the first time he had felt the emotions of defeat.

"However, that network is created under the same brainwave wavelength. If Accelerator's to be forced into it with that different wavelength of his, his brain will be burned."

"If that's the case, I just need to make a transformer that can let both sides of the wavelengths match. As for the design, I'll create an electrode collar that's connected inside."

The doctor said it rather casually, but this would take a lot of skill and calculations. Even though he knew that it would be expensive, the doctor never hesitated, and would never charge people money. He was just that kind of person.

"Alright, I really have to go now. What do you intend to do now?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I really don't want to add on to your troubles, but I have to tell you this. The higher ups seem to have heard of this incident. The research facility will be dissolved, and the 'experiment' won't just be in stasis, but completely terminated. In other words, you are fired. Good thing it's not a privatized firm, so you don't need to bear the debts, and the shooting incident can be considered self-defense. But causing a research facility to collapse completely will be a bad thing for your reputation. It's unlikely that you can ever be a researcher again."

"...I don't know. Do I have another way out?"

"Of course you do."

The doctor said casually,

"There are many paths you can choose."

Hearing these words, Yoshikawa looked like she was reminiscing the past.

One of the paths she could choose was that of a school teacher. One not naïve, but kind. She would teach Accelerator and Last Order, those children who couldn't even spell the word 'common' in common sense, and let them learn every normal thing. Perhaps that was a path she could choose.

That was a very attractive path.

That made Yoshikawa smile.

"Hey."

Yoshikawa Kikyou called out to the doctor who was about to walk out of the operation room.

"What is it?"

"You must save that child. I won't forgive you if you fail."

"Who do you think you're talking to? That's my battlefield, and no matter what, I will return from the battlefield with that patient who has always been fighting alone, healed."

The doctor walked out of the operation room.

Yoshikawa closed her eyes. A few people in surgical clothes were clearing up things beside her, but Yoshikawa wasn't mindful about it. She focused on her inside world, looking like she was asleep.

Then, she remembered what the boy had said.

The boy said,

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to? I'm the guy who killed 10,000 of that brat's companions. How can a bad guy like me save others? I can only kill, I can't save others."

"I see."

Yoshikawa smiled and said,

"If he has the heart for it, he can still do it."

Afterword

To the readers who bought each book from the first volume on, it's been a while.

To the brave souls who bought all five books at one go, nice to meet you.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

This volume is a collection of short stories. In terms of structure, this volume has the content posted on Dengeki HP (heavily modified) and three new stories. The time flow in the story itself is already slow, and this volume is the slowest of them all. Overall, I spent 5 volumes writing about summer.

In this story, there's no specific magic keyword or female protagonist that the story revolves around; it's revolved around the day August 31st in Academy City. Since it's a collection of short stories, I have to do somethings that I can't normally do. So I let a certain character become a protagonist and added some hidden themes that link the story together (for example, making Misaka an urban legend among bystanders), and I had fun with it.

Actually, there's a lot of stories that are suitable for this collection of short stories. For example, Index and Stiyl's past, Kamijou and Aogami Pierce and Komoe-sensei's past, Mikoto and Shirai Kuroko's past. But for this volume, I'll leave it as secrets. If there's a chance in the future, I'll tell these stories next time.

Haimura-san, who's in charge of the illustrations, and Miki-san, who's in charge of the project; thank you for taking care of me for so long. I'll like to thank both of you in this volume. I'm really grateful for it.

Finally, I like to thank the readers. This immature Kamachi is able to write 5 volumes thanks to everyone's support. I'm really grateful for it.

Then, as I remain grateful that this book has earned your affection, I hope that it can add on some entertainment in your life.

At this point, allow me to set my pen aside.

Oh yes. Right now, the oldest female protagonist is Komoe-sensei...is that really alright?

Kamachi Kazuma.

Notes

1. ↑ Izanagi is also known as Izanagi-no-mikoto; Touma is trying to pass it off as something like "Railgun-mikoto".
2. ↑ "I think, therefore I am" is a saying by French philosopher and writer Rene Descartes which claims that someone wondering whether or not he exists is, in and of itself, proof that he does exist.
3. ↑ In the original text, Tsuchimikado Maika is using speech between equals/commoners to talk with Mikoto.
4. ↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yaoi
5. ↑ Older sisters
6. ↑ Younger sister
7. ↑ Oniisan = older brother. -san is usually replaced by -chan to show endearment.
8. ↑ A reference to gal games.
9. ↑ Irewa **(?)** is a term used in Japanese fandom used to describe plants, animals, or non-living things as a human, mostly as kawaii girls

Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 05

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Translated by **Teh_Ping**, **Flere821** & **EnigmaticRepose**

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Prologue  - Flere821 – Completed
Chapter 1 - Teh_Ping – Completed
Chapter 2 - EnigmaticRepose – Completed
Chapter 3 - Teh_Ping – Completed
Chapter 4 - Teh_Ping – Completed
Epilogue  - Teh_Ping – Completed
Afterword - Teh_Ping – Completed
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